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THE PARTISAN SPY:

OR,

THE WITCH OF THE SANTEE SWAMPS.

BY JOS. E. BADGER, JR.,

AUTHOR OF THE FOLLOWING DIME NOVELS:

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THE PARTISAN SPY.

CHAPTER I.

JUST IN TIME!

"WHY don't he come?" murmured the lady, checking the impatient pawing of her spirited steed, with a pull upon the bridle-reins, and glancing along the road as if in search of some one.

We have said that the watcher was a lady—an equestrienne. And we might have added that she was an exquisitely fair one, without going beyond bounds.

Of a superbly—almost voluptuously developed form, something above the medium height, that was displayed to perfection by her neatly-fitting riding habit of dark-green cloth, she sat her charger with graceful ease and firmness, despite its curveting and caracoling, fretting against the unwonted restraint of a tightly-drawn rein. She was a brunette, with magnificent black hair, glossy as the raven's plumage, now coiled at the back of her queenly-poised head; and large brilliant eyes that shone like the berry of the blackthorn. Her face was an almost perfect oval; her features nearly classically correct, and the pure glow of robust health crimsoned her cheek.

And then as she ceased her impatiently-lingering glance, the lady drew a note from her bosom, and opening it, glanced hurriedly over it. With an author's liberty we read, over her shoulder, as follows:

"IN CAMP, JUNE, 177-.

"DEAR ESTHER:

For certain reasons I can not visit you, as intended, at the house. But I must see you, if possible, this afternoon, as I am about to change my location, and there is no telling where I may stop, or where we will meet again, after to-day. I have much to tell you, and shall expect you at the spot where the two trees form an arch over the road leading south from your house. You know the place. I send this by a trusty hand. Try and be there at the latest. Yesterday I had a little skir-

mish with the Tory gang of Calvin Potter, and was injured slightly in my sword-arm. It bothers me some to hold a pen, but I guess you will have no difficulty in recognizing this scrawl.

"In hope of meeting you, I remain, as ever, yours,
"BERTRAM CHEYNE."

"That accounts for my not recognizing the handwriting, although it resembles his, too. *Slightly*, he says, but I fear me 'tis worse than he would have me believe. But why does he not come? It is half-past three, now!" murmured Esther, as she replaced the note within its sacred repository.

Suddenly she gave a start of surprise and turned her horse's head around. A footfall had startled her, among the bushes to the right and rear of her present position.

Then the form of a man emerged from the undergrowth and paused in the middle of the road, gazing upon her pale face with a triumphant sneer. He bore a rifle, and at his waist a broad leather belt supported a brace of pistols and a short, heavy saber.

In figure he was tall and well built, and his bold, strongly-marked features were really handsome, although rendered somewhat florid by exposure to the weather and hot sun. His dress was of a half-hunter, half-military cut, bearing traces of long use and exposure, being torn and mud-bespattered.

"Calvin Potter—you here?"

"And pray where else should I be, Miss Carew, if not at the appointed rendezvous? You received my note, I presume, from your being here on time," laughed the man, approaching closer to the lady.

"Your note—I received no note from you!"

"I would not be so ungallant as to contradict a lady, for the world," retorted Potter, with a mocking bow, "but surely you labor under a mistake. I surely sent you a note requesting an interview here. If I err not, it was the identical one that I saw you just peruse, and which disappeared so suddenly."

"But that was signed by Bertram Cheyne!" incautiously exclaimed Esther.

"Is it possible? Then I must have made a mistake and signed his name instead of my own. However, I do not

suppose that this little error will affect him much, in the place he now adorns," sneered Potter, malignantly.

"How so—what do you mean?" faltered the woman, uneasily, for there was a deep meaning in the words and tone of the man that sent a cold thrill grasping at her heart-strings.

"Well, I suppose you might as well hear the truth now as at some future time, as you would, even did I not tell you. It is very pleasant to be the welcome messenger that imparts such joyous tidings, is it not? Ah, you are impatient, I see. Well, I will not keep you in suspense any longer.

"Yesterday morning, before daydawn, I led my band of 'True Blues' to pay a visit to the camp of this doughty rebel, Captain Bertram Cheyne, intending to take breakfast with him. My boys were very hungry, and when they smelled the hot venison steaks broiling, they rushed forward at a double-quick. But the rebels, not knowing their best friends, or else angry at our self-invitation, fearing they would not get enough to eat, gave us such a warm welcome that several of my boys sunk to the ground, completely overpowered by the compliments they had received.

"My boys are rather hot-headed, and—well, more than one poor fellow broke his fast upon cold lead and steel, instead of hot meat. The worthy captain and myself indulged in a little passage at arms, just to improve our sword-play, you see. But unfortunately he tried to beat down my guard by throwing himself upon my sword-point. It was sharp—and, to cut the matter short, he went to rally such of his men as had fled—*from this life!*

"I naturally expected that you would like to hear the news, and so wrote that note. Of course I was so deeply affected by the melancholy catastrophe that had befallen my much-loved friend and comrade, that you can not wonder at my having signed his name instead of my own," concluded the Tory leader with a diabolical laugh.

"It is a falsehood—a lie as base and black as your own heart!" cried Esther, choking down the swelling that impeded her utterance. "You *dare* not meet Cheyne in a fight, hand-to-hand. If you have slain him, it was from an ambush and when his back was turned!"

"You are disposed to be quite complimentary this evening, my dear lady," sneered Potter, but there was a wickedly vindictive glitter in his light-blue eye. "But let that pass now. I did not come here merely to bandy words. I came to renew my suit for your hand; to claim my fair bride—that is to be!"

"Stand back, you cowardly villain!" cried Esther, raising her whip as the Tory advanced, while her great black eyes flashed with indignation. "You were horsewhipped once for presumption until you cried and begged like a schoolboy, and—"

"Thank you for freshening my memory, Miss Carew," hissed Potter, springing forward and grasping at her bridle-reins. "I might otherwise have felt some compunction about using force toward a woman. As for your lover, he will yet regret that deed—I have sworn to kill—"

"Ha! then you *did* lie!" cried Esther, exultantly, as she reined her steed back to avoid the Tory's grasp. "You have not killed him!"

Calvin Potter uttered a snarl of rage and clutched the bridle-reins, almost throwing the horse upon his haunches, but then the lithe arm of the woman, clasping the flexible hide whip, rose and fell with cutting force. The lash curled across the uplifted face of the man, leaving a long purple welt, from which the blood began to slowly ooze.

Maddened and blinded by the pain, Potter threw up his hands and staggered back, at the same time shouting:

"Stop her, boys—shoot the—horse!"

Esther urged her animal forward, but only for a short distance. A couple of ragged, ferocious-looking ruffians sprung out into the road before her, and one of them shot the horse through the brain. It reared backward, falling heavily, and casting its rider with violence to the ground.

As she fell, Esther uttered a loud, thrilling shriek of terror, and then fainted. The Tory leader sprung to his feet and then started toward her, with an exultant cry. But he was destined to meet with a bitter disappointment.

During the confusion of the struggle, none of the actors had paid any attention to the rapidly-approaching tread of a horse's hoofs, and just as Esther uttered her cry for help, a horseman

dashed madly around the abrupt bend in the wood. He appeared to divine the truth by instinct, and without pausing to count the odds, he drew a long, heavy saber and dashed forward with a hoarse cry of rage and fury.

The Tories uttered a cry of surprise, but ere they could draw a weapon, the rider was upon them. With one swinging stroke he cut down the foremost ruffian, who sunk to the ground without a groan, his head literally cloven in twain.

The second man attempted to spring out of the way, but a single touch of the bridle-rein guided the horse, whose fore feet struck the doomed outlaw full in the breast, crushing him to the earth like a blade of grass.

Calvin Potter adroitly dodged the hissing blade that was leveled at his head, and plunged headlong into the bushes that lined the road, without a momentary thought of resistance.

The rescuer turned and sent a pistol bullet whistling after the fugitive, but without inflicting any damage. A glance at the fainting form decided him, and abandoning all thoughts of pursuit, he leaped from his saddle and rushed to her side.

For a moment he believed she was dead, and pressed passionate kisses upon her pallid lips and cheeks, calling her by name, coupled with many an endearing epithet. Then perceiving that she still breathed, though but faintly, he produced a liquor flask, and parting her lips, poured a few drops of the fiery liquid between her tightly-clenched teeth.

He was a noble-looking specimen of masculine strength and beauty. Fully six feet in height, if indeed he was not more, his figure was molded in just proportions, evidently possessing more than ordinary power and activity, combined.

His broad slouched hat having fallen from his head revealed his face fully. His features, though massive, corresponding well with his stature, were expressive of intelligence, firm, decisive will and undaunted courage. His forehead was broad and full, his eyes large and of a deep hazel hue; his nose slightly aquiline; his mouth well-cut, with a rather short upper lip; the chin full and rounded.

His face was smoothly shaven, but his hair, of a deep rich brown, was long and thickly curling. His dress was that of a Continental officer, though sadly faded and timeworn, evi-

mently having seen considerable service. His age did not exceed thirty, and might have been several years beneath that period.

Such was Bertram Cheyne, captain in the American service, and leader of a band of those men who did so great and glorious service under the leadership of Marion, Sumter, Morgan, Col. Washington and other names that occupy such a high niche in the temple of our country's fame and history.

The color began to return to the cheeks and lips of the woman, and then, with a deep sigh, she opened her eyes. The light of terror quickly fled from them, however, as she recognized the form bending over her, and she murmured:

"Bertram—you alive—and here!"

"Yes, darling, I am here, and you are safe from all further danger," reassuringly replied the young soldier, tenderly raising her head to his breast.

"These men—where are they?" and Esther glanced quickly around her; then as her eyes fell upon the ghastly forms of the two outlaws, she shuddered convulsively and covered her face with her hands to shut out the dreadful sight.

"They are harmless now, Esther; but wait a moment and I will put them out of sight," and the partisan arose.

The one that had been stricken down by the horse's hoofs was also dead. The iron-shod feet had horribly mangled his form, killing him instantly.

With a keen glance at their faces, Cheyne dragged them from the road and cast the bodies into the bushes. He had recognized them as two brutal ruffians whose black deeds of murder and rapine merited death a thousand-fold, and he felt not the slightest compunction at being thus made the instrument of their punishment: rather, a wild, peculiar sensation of joy filled his heart.

Then he turned once more toward the spot where sat the woman.

"Come, Esther; I will see you safe home if you will mount my horse. I have much to tell you, and then I wish to know how all this came about. Do you think you can ride?"

"I would rather walk, if you will endure a little support. Oh, Bertram, you do not know how grateful I am to you for

saving me from *him*!" shuddered the maiden, as she arose, leaning upon the strong arm of the soldier.

"From—who?"

"Calvin Potter!"

"Ha! it was *him* then—the cowardly cur! He fled so quickly that I did not recognize him. Well, it is but one more item in the account, when we come to settle finally, and then— But how was it that he chanced to meet you, Esther?"

"He sent me a note purporting to come from you, and—"

"A note—I *did* send you a note, Esther."

The girl produced the missive and handed it to Cheyne.

"This is mine. I wrote it and sent it by a trusty man. Could he have— Esther, do you remember what sort of a person gave you this?"

"Yes. He was a very tall, ungainly-looking man, who stuttered dreadfully."

"And Potter said that *he* sent it?"

"Yes."

"I sent it by an entirely different person. Poor Rogers! If they have captured him and suspected what he really is, his doom is surely sealed! And I am forced to leave so soon, I fear I can do nothing to save him," muttered the partisan, sadly, as he returned the note.

"Leave—so soon?" echoed Esther.

"Yes, did I not tell you in the note? I have received orders from General Marion to report with my band to him for active service, and I must start to-night, or else early in the morning. That is why I was so urgent for you to meet me here to-day. I was unfortunately delayed on the road, but thank God! I arrived before it was entirely too late," fervently added Cheyne.

"Oh, this frightful war! Will it never cease?" tearfully murmured Esther, drawing closer to her lover's side. "I am in a constant dread lest you should be killed, and even of nights I awake often with your death-groan echoing in my ears. Oh, it is horrible!"

"I know it is, darling, but we must make the best of it, and look forward to a brighter future. The cause is gloomy enough at the best, but I could bear it better, could I only

hope that these other obstacles were to be surmounted. Your father—I speak it in sorrow, not in recrimination—is sternly unjust in thus visiting his enmity upon me who never did him wrong, in thought or deed, simply because I am the son of his old enemy. Is he still as bitter, Esther?”

“I fear he is, Bertram,” sadly replied the girl, pressing closer to the side of her lover. “Only yesterday Dick chanced to mention your name in his hearing, and he flew into a fearful passion, knocking the boy down and swore he would have him tied up and flogged to death if he ever repeated the offense.”

“Well, let us hope that he will forget it all in time. But, Esther, I do not believe I could give you up, even at his command. If I had not the precious hope of eventually winning you, I could not bear up against the great misfortunes that have befallen our cause. I should give up in despair, had I not that hope to strengthen me,” earnestly said the young partisan.

“Bertram, why should I permit a feeling of mock modesty—for it can be nothing else in this case—to tie my tongue? I know that you love me truly and sincerely. And I know, too, that I love you dearer—far dearer—than life itself! Then I know that you will not misjudge me when I say that I am yours, wholly and entirely, whenever you choose to claim me. I will forsake home—father—all, if you bid me come to you. Only I think it is best for us both to wait until peace once more blesses the land. To be united, only to part, would render us both less fit to endure the trial.”

“God bless you for those words, my darling! Now I can dare all—endure every thing without despairing of a happy ending! When that time comes I shall claim my bride, and our joy will be the greater—if such a thing *can* be—for having been delayed so long,” and as he spoke the young soldier bowed his head and pressed a warm pure kiss of love on the upturned lips of the maiden.

And then conversing in this manner, the lovers walked slowly onward, Cheyne leading his horse by the bridle-rein, and before either of them thought of such a thing, they came out in full view of the mansion of Mr. Donald Carew. Esther abruptly paused and her cheek paled as she noted the

tall, portly figure of an elderly gentleman arise from the broad veranda that ran along the front of the house, and stride hastily down the gravel walk toward them.

"Bersram, it is my father! He is terribly angry—promise me that you will not notice what he may say in his passion," pleaded Esther, withdrawing her arm from that of her lover, but still remaining close beside him.

"I will not—I will bear all for *your* sake, darling," whispered the partisan, and then once more they advanced toward the gate.

The planter was, as we have said, tall and portly, and usually was considered handsome, but just now his full face was flushed deeply with passion, and his eyes glittered ominously, while his massive jaws worked together with a peculiar gritting sound.

"You, Esther—what're you doing, you jade, you!" he roared out, in a thick, hoarse tone, as though his anger choked him. "You go out riding for your health and then walk home leaning upon a fellow's arm, and *such* a person, too! Oh, I saw you! you needn't deny it—I saw you leaning upon his arm and looking into his face like a love-sick kitten!" he spluttered, fumbling at the latch, his hand trembling with fury.

"Father," quietly but firmly replied Esther, advancing, and placing one hand upon the gate, "did you know what a great service this *gentleman* has done me, you would treat him more politely, as he deserves."

"As he deserves? And isn't that old Beverly Cheyne's son? What service has he done? How does he *dare* to render a child of mine a service? I'll—" fumed the old planter, but evidently a little subdued by the tone of his daughter.

"Father, but for him I should now be in the hands of a man who knows no mercy—who would have destroyed me body and soul!" solemnly added the maiden.

"What—what—!" stammered Carew, his flushed cheek blanching and his voice trembling, for if there was one thing of which he thought more than his wealth and proud old name, it was his queenly, beautiful daughter.

"I was assailed by that miscreant, Calvin Potter, and two of his men. They shot ~~my~~ horse and would have carried me

off but for the opportune appearance of this gentleman, Captain Cheyne."

"Like as not it was all a preconceived plan between themselves, for him to win your esteem and my gratitude," slowly resumed Carew, his eyes resting suspiciously upon the flushed and haughty countenance of the young partisan, who replied:

"They must have been *very* ardent friends, indeed, for two of them to suffer death in order to gain me that favor, Mr. Carew."

"Killed two—Esther, is that so?"

"It is, and the leader fled from fear. They shot my horse, and Captain Cheyne could do no less than to escort me home, to see that I met no further misfortune."

"Well, I am certainly much obliged, and if he will do me the favor to accept—" and the planter produced a plethoric purse, and opened it.

"Sir," cuttingly replied Cheyne, his eyes flashing with indignation, as his cheek purpled, "you must value your daughter's life very highly, indeed, to reward the preserver of it with such a bitter insult as this! *Money*—pah!" and abruptly turning, the young partisan leaped into his saddle.

"Bertram, for *my* sake!" pleaded Esther. "Father, you must not part with him thus. Think what he saved me from," and a shudder convulsed her frame.

"What then—he won't take money, and—"

"Bury all feud—he never injured you; the man you hated is in his grave. Do not let it descend to the living. Offer him your hand and become friends."

"Never! I, Donald Carew, clasp the hand of a Cheyne! Esther, I am ashamed of you!"

"Do not plead any further, Esther, for me. Sir, I am as proud as yourself. You have bitterly and wantonly insulted me. My hand shall never clasp yours in friendship until you have apologized amply. Rest assured that I shall never claim a favor of you. Esther farewell for the present. I know that *you* will not prove ungrateful and forget me. Remember our compact," and then the young partisan turned his horse's head down the road and rapidly galloped away.

"The impudent dog! the—the—I don't know what, to speak

"No!" spluttered the choleric planter, in an ecstasy of rage. "Girl—what did he mean? What compact is this that he meant? Speak, can't you, or do you want to drive me crazy—say?"

"Father, you are not yourself now, or you would never have insulted the preserver of your daughter's life—nay, *more*, her *honor*—in that way. Besides, I am his promised wife," coldly replied Esther.

"His promised—the deuce you say!" cried the parent, in blank dismay. "But it shan't be—you *shan't* marry him, if I have to call him out and put a pistol-bullet through his brain. Go along into the house, and don't let me see a sign of your face until you can tell me that this is all a—a mistake—a—Confound it, girl, why don't you go? Do you want to make me mad?" roared Carew, stamping his foot in ludicrous fury.

Esther turned and proceeded toward the house, with a sad and pained look, while the old planter once more resumed his promenade upon the veranda, muttering ireful threats upon the head of the audacious young scoundrel who had put him into such a passion.

CHAPTER II.

THE SWAMP HAUNT.

THE Cypress Swamp! Does the reader know what it is? We ask him to follow us, upon the morning of the day that opens our story, the better to trace up the fortunes of one of our characters, who is destined to figure prominently in the events about to be recorded.

It is an island in the very center of the swamp, thrown up by the action of various water-courses, the *debris* and ooze finally hardening into a semblance of solid earth, in the due course of time. The sun has not yet arisen, and all is intensely dark below, where it is gloomy, even during the noonday glare overhead.

We look upon the camp of a body of rangers, those men who seemed at that time to be their country's only hope.

It is a strangely wild and picturesque scene. A couple of

huge fires blaze up brightly sending a thousand fantastic shadows flickering weirdly around upon the somber-looking trees and magnifying the forms of those passing to and fro around them, into colossal proportions. These figures did not number more than two score, all told, but to a casual glance, appeared far more numerous.

All were busy. Some were engaged in cooking their rude breakfast; others, more speedy, were complacently devouring the smoking meat or roasted potatoes.

Their dress was novel, to say the least, and but added to their wild aspect. Some boasted a ragged coat or a torn jacket; but these were the fortunate ones—the *millionaires* of the party. By far the majority were contented in the possession of a flannel or a buck-skin shirt and breeches, with either ragged boots of alligator hide or moccasins.

Their head-gear was equally varied: coon-skin caps, with the grinning head peering audaciously over their brows, and the ringed tail pendent behind; battered felt "slouches," or straw hats; while more than one simply wore a handkerchief knotted tightly around their heads, or else was content with Nature's covering.

As a general rule their faces were sadly begrimed with dirt and the black smoke of the pitch-pine fires; such portions as were not hidden by the rough, matted beards. And their accouterments seemed quite in keeping with the rest.

There was the long heavy-barreled "pea-shooter," that in the hands of more than one could "drive the nail," or "snuff the candle" at an hundred yards; the cumbersome musket, without the bayonet; great clumsy horse-pistols, that were almost as dangerous at one end as the other, and of but little utility in any case; and long heavy sabers. In this, at least, there was some semblance of uniformity, for every man possessed one; evidently the handiwork of a stalwart blacksmith, and made for good service, not mere looks.

Confiding implicitly in the skill and watchfulness of their guards and scouts, the party were far from silent. There was the boisterous laugh, the quick, cutting retort, not unmingled with angry oaths and hasty words, or the stirring song from some one more musically inclined.

These, with the wild spirits conjured up by the camp-fire

—the flashing waters and the wreathing curls of heavy black smoke that settled down over the party like a sable pall, only to be lifted and borne eddying away upon some gust of wind—the occasional screech of the owl—the plaintive wail of the whippowill—the shrill piping of the tree frog, answered back by the myriads of their deeper-toned brethren of the swamp-waters—the far-away cry of the prowling wild-cat, or the shrill whicker of a startled horse, united, formed a wildly picturesque tableau, that once beheld, could never be forgotten.

A little to one side were seated two men, beside whom flickered a pine-knot torch planted upright in the soft ground. The larger one of the *duo* was just superscribing a note, using his hat for a writing-desk, and then handing it to his companion, he said :

“There, capt—”

“Call me Coon—Coon Rogers, captain, if you please,” hastily interrupted the man addressed.

“Pardon me, I forgot. It would be best, no doubt, for although we are all true men here, we can not be too prudent. Besides, I suppose I must get accustomed to it, anyhow. Well then, if you will be so kind as to deliver this note, as you ride by, I would be greatly obliged. It would spare me sending a man, and they have need of all their time, if we make the move so soon,” added the taller man ; him whom we know as Bertram Cheyne.

“It will not discommode me in the least, as I must pass directly by the house, and I can leave it just as well as not. The old man must not see it, then ?”

“No. Give it to her, or else one of the servants. If to any of the blacks, just add that “Marse Bert,” sent it, and does not want any one of the family to know it but their young mistress.”

“All right ; I understand. Well, when you see the General, tell him that all has prospered finely thus far, and that I will be with him at the time appointed. And now, captain, I must say good-by ; but I trust that our acquaintance is not to end here. Will you order my horse ?”

“Then you start now ?”

“At once. But the woods—are they safe, or are there many of the Tory bands in the neighborhood ?”

"They are as safe as could be expected. I only know of one gang anywhere near this; that of Calvin Potter. But we gave him a taste of our metal night before last, or rather yesterday morning, that will satisfy him for a spell."

"I know him—for a cowardly villain and murderer!" hoarsely replied the man called Coon Rogers, and a bitterly vindictive light shone from his keen black eyes. "He and I have a little account to settle, when the right time comes."

The partisan leader now turned and left the island, followed by the other, and after wading a few yards knee-deep through the slush, gained a second island, upon which were tethered a number of horses. Rogers selected one of these, and mounting rode forth into the swamp, preceded by Cheyne, who led him beyond the outermost sentinels.

"Well, you know our secret signs and passwords, and the man who responds to them you can trust as a friend with your life, if need be. Now, good-by."

"Good-by. I will deliver your note, and you can depend upon an answer in person, at the rendezvous," replied Coon, and then he rode along the half-submerged pathway.

The gloom was thick and his pathway relieved only by the pale and skeleton forms of the cypress trees clustering in groups alongside the trail, and the traveler allowed his pony to choose its way, feeling more confidence in its instinct than upon his own sight and judgment.

It was one of those diminutive ponies, called "swamp tockies," who seem indigenous to that section, surefooted and active as a cat—or more appropriate *simile*, as a Mexican mule.

It was a weird, almost an awe-inspiring journey. At times a phosphorescent light would flicker upon the surface of the stagnant waters, into which the "alligator terrapin" plunged heavily, disturbed from his rest by the splashing of horse's hoofs, while the millions of frogs croaked forth their inharmonious song, adding not a little to the feeling of gloomy oppression that involuntarily settled over the spirit of the rider.

Then there was added to these still other sounds. The cry of birds aroused by the break of day—the hum of the drowsy beetle—the chirping and buzzing of innumerable insects that infest the swampy recesses of the South, rendering them a

continual scene of gloomy and distracting life, during the commencement of summer, or in its height.

For several miles Coon Rogers wound through the swamp, without once pausing, or seeming in doubt as to his right course, and an observer, had there been one at hand, would have undoubtedly pronounced him an old "swamp fox." And they would have been right.

As he rode out upon a higher tract of ground, it became dryer and more firm, and from the aspect of the surrounding trees, Coon knew that he had left the swamp behind him. Reining in his pony, the scout pushed the slouched hat back from his brow, glancing keenly and warily around him.

He did not appear to be much, if any, over five and thirty years of age, and was of an extremely powerful development, rather stout than high, with a short, thick neck—a head round and large, with eyes small, deeply-set and piercing—and features almost immobile in their general expression of settled decisive severity.

His face was smooth, with the exception of a pair of heavy penthouse eyebrows, long and shaggy, that lent a stern, almost fierce, expression to the glittering orbs below. His hair was of a medium brown tint, and was worn rather long.

His weapons consisted of a very heavy-barreled rifle of small caliber, a brace of stout pistols and a horn-hafted knife in the belt at his waist. His dress consisted of part buck-skin, part "plantation cloth," soiled and travel-stained.

Just as he turned to once more resume his course, a shrill whistle rung out from the woods upon his right, and a voice called out:

"Wait a bit, stranger; I've a word to speak wi' you," and the form of a tall, sinewy-built man stepped out into the open path, his rifle being held in readiness for instant use.

The traveler thus abruptly accosted, threw forward the muzzle of his rifle as if mechanically, but quick as was his notion, it was anticipated by the other, who covered the scout's heart with the dark, leveled tube.

"Stop! don't ye lift that no further—ef you do I'll plug ye—shore! Down wi' your pea-shooter. Thar's hafe a dozent bar'ls a-b'arin' on ye this minnit; ain't thar, boys?"

A series of whistles similar to the one that had first startled

Coon, echoed from both sides of the road, in answer to their leader's query. A sudden change seemed to pass over the features and entire person of Rogers. From the resolute, energetic-looking scout, he changed to the listless, feeble, *effete* look which stamps that class called "clay-eaters," "poor white trash," etc.

"What d'ye want o' me?" he drawled, in an affrighted tone. "Don't ye know me? Ye're one o' that 'ere sodjer feller's men, ain't ye? He said you would't hurt me if I'd do as he told me to."

"What feller do you mean? Look out how you try to fool me. We ain't that kind, *we* ain't. Lord, man, we'd think nothin' o' stringin' you up to the limb o' that tree yander, fer to scare the crows. We do it of'en, jes' fer fun, to sech fellers as you be," coolly replied the stranger, approaching Coon but keeping a wary eye upon him at the same time.

"Lordy, don't—please don't do me that a-way! It'd hurt, it would, I know! I hain't done nothin' to you, hev I, say? Then what do you want to skeer a feller by talkin' so f'ercelike as that?"

"Come, come, my fine feller, don't blarney so much, but out with it—who that feller was you spoke of?" impatiently interrupted the man.

"I don't know—hope may die 'f I do!" declared Coon. "I was jest a-ridin' along peace'bly, like I was jest now, when a whoppin' big feller he rid out at me, a-swinging his toad-sticker like blazes, an' axed who was I, and whar was I gwine. I told him I was gwine up a ways on the Santee, an' was a peace'ble critter what didn't want to hurt nobody nor nothin'. Then he axed me would I jine his comp'ny an' fight the red-coats."

"I told him I was afeerd I'd git hurt. Then he told me ef I'd kerry a note to his gal he'd let me go. Ef I met any o' Calvin Potter's men, I was to tell 'em he was a liddle ways back thar in the swamp, with only ten men, an' to show 'em the way, ef they'd come."

"How many men *did* he hev?" eagerly queried the Tory—for such he evidently was, as Coon had repeatedly made the mystic sign, as given him by Cheyne, unnoticed.

"Lord, I don't know. I cain't count nothin'!"

"Had he more then you hev got fingers?"

"More'n *them*? Jee-rusalem pancakes, I reckon he *hed*—a pesky sight more!" earnestly replied Rogers.

"Look hyar, my man," sternly replied the Tory; "you may be what you say, but I don't b'lieve it. Them eyes o' your'n show thet you ain't quite sech a fool as you'd like me to think. So you jest foller a'ter me, an' I'll tote you to the capt'n. But mind ye, don't you try none o' your tricks on me, for thar's keen eyes on ye. Come out, boys, an' let 'im see you."

As the Tory spoke, a half-dozen men entered the road, and stood surrounding the scout. He gazed at them vacantly, but in seemingly not a little terror.

"Now, boys, keep close watch on the cretter, an' ef he tries to dodge us, jest plug him—d'ye mind?"

A significant murmur was the reply, and Coon perceived that none of them would hesitate to obey their orders, did he afford them the slightest provocation. His plan was quickly laid, and turning to the leader, he said:

"You needn't make a feller feel so bad, mister, talkin' that a-way. *I* don't want to run off ef *you* don't want me to. Who is your cap'n?"

"You'll find out a plenty soon, I'm thinkin'," gruffly responded the Tory; and then he plunged into the forest, followed by Coon, the other outlaws bringing up the rear and guarding both sides, with weapons ready to frustrate any attempt of their captive to escape.

Rogers felt that he was in a truly perilous situation, and one that would require all his tact and address to extricate himself from in safety. He feared that the leader alluded to was Calvin Potter, and he dreaded a meeting with him upon such terms.

Years ago there had been a tragedy, in which they had been both deeply interested, that had led to a deep and bitter enmity, although as yet the time for a settlement had not come, nor had they ever met since that time. But he knew that was he recognized now, death, sure and speedy, would be his doom!

Coon also feared that he would be searched and the note signed by Bertram Cheyne found upon his person, and although, did he maintain his incognito, this fact could be

explained by the same story he had already told, it might prove the death of his new friend. What easier than for Potter to ambush the rendezvous, and either capture or kill the partisan?

Still, what he had done was for the best, for had he been searched by the Tories then, and it found upon his person, they would have concluded he was one of the partisan's men, and have made short work with him accordingly. So, trusting that he might yet be able to frustrate them, Coon rode on after his tall guide, in silence.

An hour's rapid progress brought them to their destination, which Rogers found to be very similar to the camp of the patriot rangers; only upon a smaller scale, the Tory band not numbering more than a score. At the edge of this island, Coon was ordered to dismount, and then followed the Tory through the group of men, to the opposite extremity, where sat a tall, good-looking man: Calvin Potter in person.

"Well, Hamlin, who is this?" he asked in a clear tone, closely scrutinizing the scout, who met his gaze with one of placid awe; but at his heart there was a wild, fierce tumult, and he could scarcely restrain himself from springing at his throat and throttling him with his naked hands.

"I don't know, jestly, cap'in," respectfully replied the tall Tory. "I picked him up in the swamp road, an' he told a long riggeramarole 'bout a feller that I consait is that Bert Cheyne."

"Well, sir," added Potter, evidently not recognizing the scout, "what is all this? Speak out. You need fear no harm, if you are honest."

Coon Rogers quickly related the same fiction he had told Hamlin; Potter listening with keen interest, a dark scowl disfiguring his brow.

"Only ten men! But he had five times as many only night before last. How is that?" cried the Tory, suspiciously.

"He tole me to say that he sent 'em away, last night."

"But had he? How many were there? Beware how you attempt to deceive me, fellow. A pistol-bullet, or a dance from a swaying bough is all the reward such persons receive from us," sternly warned Potter.

"I don't know. They didn't tell me, an' I cain't count—don't know how."

"Look out there—were there as many men as I have got?"

"Lord, yes, I guess thar was! Three times as many, purty nigh."

"Ask him about the note, cap'n," suggested Hamlin, who was Potter's lieutenant and right-hand man.

"The note?—what note is that?"

"He—the big sodjer feller—give me a note which he said I mustn't let nobody see," faltered Coon. "He swore he'd chop me clean open ef I did so!"

"And I'll swear you the same if you don't, so you can take your choice."

"Oh, durn each a kentry! Every feller wants to kill, shoot, stick or hang somebody else, which is al'ays *me!*" groaned Coon. "Hyar it is then; you kin totch me *now* an' he *cain't*, an' I ruther guess I'll take good keer to keep out o' his way, a'ter this," muttered Rogers, producing the note directed to Esther Carew.

An expression of fiendish delight rested upon the features of the Tory, as he perused the missive, after which he arose and began slowly pacing to and fro, his head bowed as if in deep cogitation. For a time neither spoke, but then Hamlin, who began to grow impatient, said:

"What shall I do with this feller, cap'n?"

"Who? oh, yes. Well, set some trusty man to keep a close watch upon him, and not allow him to leave the camp. And tell the guards not to allow any one to leave the place without giving the passwords. Stay," he added, as Hamlin turned away, "send me a man—let me see, Stuttering Joe'll do."

In a few moments this Tory—so called from his ludicrous impediment of speech—came up and stood ready to receive the instructions of his chief.

"Joe, do you know where old Carew lives? And does he know you?"

A nod, first affirmative and then negative, was the reply.

"Then you take this note and give it to one of the niggers, or eise Miss Esther herself. Do you understand me? Then hasten back here and tell me what she said. Wait—if she asks who sent it tell her Captain Bertram Cheyne—do you mind?"

Another vigorous nod was the reply, and then the long, shambling form of the ungainly Tory strode rapidly away through the swamp.

At about noon the messenger returned, and reported that he had delivered the note into the lady's own hand, and that upon reading it, she had promised to comply with the request contained. Hugely pleased, the Tory leader soon set off to keep the appointment, accompanied by Hamlin and one other, for he concluded upon capturing, or killing his enemy, at the same time he abducted the woman who had once scorned his love.

Meanwhile Coon Rogers had not been idle. He had been placed under guard, 'tis true, but he had hopes of escaping from the enemies' toils before the return of Potter, if indeed he was not in time to frustrate the plans of that worthy.

He had strolled around the island, entering into conversation with first one and then another of the outlaws, carelessly making the peculiar signal, that was one of the passwords in general use among the patriots. And at length, in addressing one, a small, slender man, wiry and active as a panther, Coon perceived him start, and then after a keen glance into his eyes, make the answering motion.

A wild thrill of exultation filled the heart of Rogers, as he realized he had found a friend, and upon whose aid he might confidently rely. But he suppressed all trace of emotion, and with a peculiar glance, turned and slowly strolled away, followed presently by the stranger.

First noting that none of the Tories were within ear-shot of their present position, although the eyes of several were fixed curiously upon them, Coon uttered, in a low, guarded tone:

"That was a peculiar motion you made, my friend, just now."

"An' in answer to one jest as queer," quietly retorted the little man.

"You know its meaning, I presume?"

"Do you?"

"Yes. It meant that you are a friend to the good cause, and consequently a friend of mine. It means that you must and are willing to help a brother that calls upon you for aid."

"Ef he is the right sort; yes. But what's the use o' beatin' round the bush this way? Ef you *shed* be a spy an' tell them fellers what I say, they wouldn't believe you ag'inst my word. Then I tell you, right out flatfooted, that I am a member of Cap'n Cheyne's band o' rough riders; patriots—rebels, jest as you like to call 'em."

"Good! and I am a friend of his, also. I will tell you my real name," and Coon Rogers stooped and whispered a few words in an almost inaudible tone:

"Ge—thunder! you don't say so!" muttered the spy, in a tone of half doubt.

"Hush—be careful," cautioned Rogers, moving away a step. "Those fellers are eying us closely. But now, can you assist me to escape—at once?"

"I kin give you the password, an' then no one 'll dar' to stop ye. Jest tell 'em, ef they do, that the cap'n give it to you afore he went away. But you'd best pretend to take a nap for awhile, so 's to easy that feller what was told to watch you, an' then I'll git him to playin' keards. Ef he onc't tetches *them*, you could take his years plum off, an' he'd never know the diffrance."

"But the words?"

"Are '*Tarleton's Quarters*.' They'll pass ye to onc't, a'ter you git cl'ar o' the island. Fust I'll take your pony out 'long the trail; then come back an' fix thet Cowley."

"Your name is—what?"

"Gavin—Jim Gavin."

"Good! I'll remember you. I wish I could clasp your hand in a grip of friendship, Gavin, but the rest might suspect something," warmly added Coon.

"It wouldn't do now, sir, but the time may come, an' ef you're still willin', it 'll be a proud day for old Jim Gavin that he shakes *your* hand."

"I shall be more than willing, my friend; glad to do so. But we'd best part now. Make what haste you can, for time is precious with me," hastily added Rogers, turning away and approaching the main group.

He conversed idly with several of these, and then as Gavin disappeared, the scout turned away with a frightful yawn, and looked about as if for some comfortable spot where he

might lie down. He soon found one that suited his purpose beneath the overhanging bough of a tree that cast the ground into dense shade.

He had not long to await the actions of Gavin, who, upon returning, at once bantered the guard, Cowley, to a game of "seven up," which that worthy, after one glance at the apparently sleeping form of his charge, accepted. And in a few moments he was as deeply absorbed in the game and as oblivious to all other things as Jim Gavin had predicted.

The remainder of the Tory gang were similarly occupied, or else sleeping, smoking and talking, not taking a thought of their prisoner. He had not been confided to their care, save that of Cowley, and it is doubtful whether they would have interfered if they had seen him leaving the island.

Feeling that his opportunity had come at last, Coon Rogers stealthily rolled over and over until he had gained the very verge of the island, and then he glided noiselessly around until the trail by which he had been conducted into the camp was reached, when he proceeded at a more rapid pace. Twice only was he interrupted, and then the password was all that the sentinels required ere he was allowed to proceed.

Then in a few moments more, Coon found his pony secured beside the trail, with a rifle strapped to the saddle in place of the one he had lost. Jim Gavin had been as good as his word, and leaping into the saddle, the rebel scout rode rapidly along the faintly-defined trail, feeling that he had made a very fortunate escape, indeed.

CHAPTER III.

COON MASQUERADES.

COON ROGERS felt that he had made a very lucky escape from his old enemy, Calvin Potter, who had failed to recognize the man whom he had so deeply wronged, years before. But this fact was no doubt aided by the joy the Tory leader

felt at the prospect thus held out for him to be revenged upon the woman whom he loved, and the man whom he hated. Otherwise, the captive's examination would have been more close and thorough.

The scout had resolved to visit the spot mentioned by Bertram Cheyne as the rendezvous, having a faint hope that he might still be in time to frustrate the plans of Potter. It was already considerably past the time appointed for the meeting, and the chance of his being in time to render any service, was faint indeed.

The traits of the swamp-scout were now forcibly displayed, and the listless, almost stupid expression which Coon had worn while in the camp of his enemy, now vanished before an Indian-like sagacity, and resolute demeanor. Bending low down in the saddle with eyes roving rapidly to the right, left and before him, without an instant's pause, the scout trotted rapidly along upon the trail that had been left by himself and captors in proceeding toward the Tory retreat.

The water and liquid mud had filled their tracks, but by glancing ahead where the dim light shimmered down upon the swamp, there could be detected a long irregular line, something darker than the surrounding surface, and along this the scout now hastened.

Thoroughly familiar with the swamp, which in days gone by he had often traversed, Coon did not hesitate, but after awhile diverged from the trail, striking out through the woods in a course that would bring him more directly to the "Elm Arch," where the meeting was to take place. Suddenly he cast a quick, startled glance around him, and half raised his rifle.

His keen ear had caught a suspicious sound among the bushes, to the right of his present position. It had sounded like the sharp click of a gun being cocked, followed by an other lower and less clear, as if the hammer had fallen but without discharging the rifle.

Coon Rogers was not a man to hesitate long when an unseen danger threatened, and wrenched his pony's head around, toward the spot from whence the sound had proceeded, with rifle cocked ready for use. But as he dashed through the clump of bushes he could discern naught, and was forced to believe that his imagination had deceived him.

Scarcely had he advanced a score of yards after leaving the bushes, ere the form of a man uprose from the mud and water, where he had submerged himself, and shook a clenched fist after the scout, while words of bitter import hissed fiercely from between his clenched teeth.

Another half-hour sufficed to carry Coon out into the hard road, and then he saw that that he had been too late; that the tragedy had been enacted already. A shudder crept over his strong frame as he noted the dead horse, and then in two several places tell-tale patches of blood upon the earth that told of death; crimson evidences that there had at least two lives been terminated.

The horse he knew from the trappings had belonged to a lady; where then was its rider and the young partisan whom she had come to meet? Although his acquaintance with Bertram Cheyne could easily be numbered by hours, the scout had experienced a strong feeling of friendship for the gallant young ranger that was as sincere and ardent as if it had been the growth of years, instead of a day.

His quick eye noted the traces where heavy bodies had been dragged from the bloody spot, into the bushes, and, fearing the worst, he rode into the swamp. A grim smile of joy overspread his features as he recognized the dead men for those of the Tories whom he had seen accompany Potter.

Then a sudden idea struck him, and dismounting, Coon hurriedly searched the person of the taller outlaw, who was none other than Seth Hamlin, the Tory Lieutenant who had captured him sometime previously. A smile of satisfaction played around Coon's lips as he secured the paper that he found, carefully within his breast pocket.

He felt that now he was fully prepared for his mission, barring some extraordinary accident. And then as he remounted to continue on his journey, the sound of rapidly-approaching hoof-strokes startled him.

Preparing his weapons, Coon stood silent, resolving to make a desperate fight, if discovered; but if not, to allow the horseman to pass by unmolested. But then as the sounds came nearer, his features relaxed somewhat, for he saw that there was but one rider, and as he spurred out in sight around the curve, Coon sprung out into the road.

It was the young partisan, Bertram Cheyne, returning from escorting Esther Carew to her home.

Then mutual explanations followed, and both being pressed for time, soon parted, each pursuing his own course. But they had not ridden a score yards, ere a squad of horsemen dashed from the swamp out into the road directly between them.

The leader was Calvin Potter, who had returned with a dozen men to avenge, if possible, the death of his coadjutors, upon the young soldier, as he returned from Carew's. A score moments sooner and he would have secured both of his enemies.

The two men, however, instantly perceived the danger that threatened them, and knowing that resistance was idle, put spurs to their animals and darted away at headlong speed, followed by a hasty volley of rifle-bullets. Fortunately these were too suddenly discharged to take effect, and hurtled wide of their mark.

"Half of you 'tend to that rebel," shouted Potter as he turned to pursue Cheyne. "Fifty pounds to the man that brings me the scalp of either!"

A series of wild yells followed this brutal speech, and the Tories dashed forward, eager to secure the munificent reward. For that sum they would take a dozen such trophies, did it lay in their power.

The fugitives also heard the offer, and knew that their fate was assuredly sealed did they suffer capture. Coon Rogers bent low down upon the shaggy neck of his pony, and urged him on with voice and heel.

Right nobly did the diminutive "tocky" respond to his appeal, and he seemed to possess wings to his feet, so swiftly did he dart along the road. And the scout felt a peculiar sensation of wild exultation as he glanced over his shoulder and saw that he was holding his own, even were he not increasing his vantage.

Then a stern, deadly fire shone in his eyes; a light that betrayed how deep and bitter was his hatred toward those who had proved traitors in their country's direst need. Those who for foreign gold had taken sides against the cause of freedom, to fight against their own neighbors and brothers;

those human birds of prey who gorged themselves upon the fragments of spoil left by their more brave allies.

A glance told Coon that there was no danger of his rifle missing fire. The pan was full, the powder dry; and turning half around in his saddle, Rogers took a quick aim at the foremost of his pursuers.

The trigger touched—a bright flash accompanied the quick sharp report; the leading Tory reeled in his saddle for a moment, and then with a loud cry, fell headlong to the earth, being trampled over by the horses of his comrades, ere they could check their mad career.

But then, still further desirous of securing the fugitive, the pursuers pressed on, feeling assured of their prey, seeing that his rifle was now empty. Their rifles were also unloaded, and fearing to load lest they should lose time, the Tories did not attempt to recharge them.

Feeling confident of their prey, each one strove his utmost to be the first within arm's length, in order to secure the reward offered by Potter, by being the one to deal the death-blow. And thus the chase sped on.

Coon Rogers felt comparatively little fear of being captured. He knew that he could equal the best of his pursuers in speed, and placed the most implicit confidence in the bottom of his pony. More than once had he terribly tested it, and surely it would not fail him now, in his direst need.

Without slacking his pace in the least the scout carefully reloaded his rifle, and turned around to face his pursuers. But they knew right well that there was great peril in facing the long "pea-shooter," especially when held by such hands, and instinctively each man jerked up his horse.

Noting this, Coon did the same, and then once more turning, he drew a quick bead upon one of the Tories, and fired. The scout's hand and eye did not fail him, and the next moment there was one the less of his pursuers to trouble him.

Then with a wild ringing laugh of defiance, the rebel urged his pony forward at headlong speed, feeling that he had punished the enemy sufficiently, provided they could take the hint. He did not much care whether they continued the chase or not, as he was heading in the direction necessary to follow in order to carry out his intentions.

Recovering, the Tories once more dashed on after their daring enemy, but the pause, brief though it was, had enabled Rogers to secure such a lead as to carry him beyond rifle-shot. Then the chase sped on.

Past Carew's plantation and again on into the swamp, through which the road wound, each moment slowly increasing the distance between the two parties, as the pursuers became strung out according to the quality of their animals.

Only one man, a tall, lithe, determined-looking fellow, mounted upon a pony the counterpart of the one bestrode by Coon—threatened to cause the scout any trouble. Far in advance of his comrades, this man—who was none other than "Stuttering Joe," the counterfeit messenger—fully held his own, and Rogers saw that if he hoped to escape, he must dispose of the Tory.

The others were so far distant that he felt assured that the struggle would be over before they could come up, and checking somewhat of his pony's speed, he began rapidly reloading his rifle. "Stuttering Joe" did the same, but in his haste, broke the hickory ramrod short off, in withdrawing it from the thimbles.

Uttering a wild yell that would have done credit to a Comanche Indian, the tall squatter drew his knife and dashed forward, hoping to come up with the scout ere he could finish loading. But the keen eye of Rogers had noted the mishap, and he was ready for the onset.

Turning his horse's head around, resting his rifle across the saddle, Coon also drew his long knife. But this was only a blind, as he had no intention of engaging in a struggle that might be prolonged until the other Tories had time to come up.

As the yelling squatter came dashing up with brandished knife, Coon quickly shifted the weapon to his left hand, and drawing a pistol, leveled it full at Joe's head. Before the Tory could check his horse, or in any manner elude the danger, the pistol cracked and the ungainly squatter pitched headlong to the ground, with a bullet-pierced brain.

Coon caught the pony as it dashed by, and then sped on, holding it by the bridle rein, to prevent the animal that had threatened to cause him so much danger, from falling into the hands of the enemy. But the chase was now over.

for the survivors, intimidated by the loss of three of their bravest comrades without being as near rescuing their foe as at the start, abandoned the pursuit as hopeless.

For several miles Coon Rogers pressed on at a rapid pace, and then as the shades of night began to settle down upon the earth, he turned from the road and soon found a tolerably snug spot, where he could rest for the night. The surrounding bushes afforded food for his hard-worked pony, and as for himself, a piece of dried meat and corn-cake taken from the saddlebags, amply sufficed to break his fast.

At the first peep of dawn the scout was once more in the saddle and upon his route. Riding until about noon, he found himself in the neighborhood of Camden, the point for which he had been aiming.

"'Alt there!" cried a loud, hoarse voice, and then a soldier stepped from his covert out before the scout, with threatening bayonet leveled at a charge.

"Lord, yas, I will—halt or any thin' else, ef you'll on'y jist keep that pesky sticker away from my karkidge!" returned Coon, with a well-counterfeited air of terror, that evidently hugely tickled the burly sentinel, for he flourished his gleaming weapon in close proximity to the horseman, greatly to Coon's apparent discomfort.

"Quit that, dog-gone ye! Stop, I tell ye—do you want to poke a hole plum through a feller? Ef you don't let up I'll tell your boss on ye—darned ef I *don't*, now!"

"What do you mean, hany 'ow?" asked the soldier, cooling down wonderfully.

"Jest this. I'm a preticklar friend o' Lord Rawdon's, or I will be when I git 'quainted some, an' he'll jest blow you sky-high fer treatin' me so 'tarnal keerless, like. S'posin' your hand 'd 'a' slipped—whar 'd I be now? How 'd I feel with that pesky toad-sticker ram-jammed into me, a-tryin' to see wnat I hed fer breakfast—say?"

"Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm *me*, an' I want to speak to the Gin'ral," promptly replied Coon.

"Give tne countersign, then, or I must arrest you."

"Count—thunder, man, I can't count!" innocently cried Coon.

At this juncture, an officer came strolling down the road, and seeing the dispute, advanced to learn the cause.

"What is the difficulty, fellow?" he asked, in a voice singularly low and sweet-toned, but the words were uttered with such clear distinctness, that softly as they were spoken, they were easily followed.

"Well, colonel, this 'ere feller comes along, and won't give no countersign, and says as 'ow he wants to see Lud Rawdon, sir."

"Who are you?" added the officer, turning toward Coon with a look of piercing scrutiny.

"All right, kurnel," replied the spy, his demeanor changing like magic. "I kin talk straight to *you*, but that 'ere stuck-up dunderhead yander, he must go to playin' off his tricks on travelers, an' I jest give him change in the same c'ine. My name is Seth Hamlin, an' I'm leftenant in the 'True Blues,' Cap'n Col. Potter. I've come to giv' Lord Rawdon a bit of news, that he may find useful, or not, jest as he pleases."

"How do I know that you are speaking the truth, now?" demanded the officer.

"Hyar's my dockyments. Jest take a squint at 'em. Mebbe they'll do," was Coon's prompt reply, as he produced the papers taken from the corpse of the Tory lieutenant.

"They seem genuine. Come, follow me, and I will take you to his lordship."

Coon Rogers followed the officer along the road, and nearly through the town, that was filled with scarlet-coated soldiers and white gleaming tents, until his conductor paused before a highly ornamented *marquee* that served as head-quarters for the somewhat dandified Lord Rawdon, then commander of the forces at Camden.

An orderly announced the officer, and a clear, strong voice bade him enter. He did so, followed by Coon, who resigned his pony to the soldier, who eyed his uncouth charge with an air of ludicrous disdain.

"Well, Tarleton, what is it now?" asked the General, as the officer saluted his commander.

"Here is a—a gentleman who claims that he has important tidings for you."

When Rogers heard the name of his conductor, he had

given an almost imperceptible start of surprise, and his eyes dwelt upon the slight, almost delicate figure of the famous cavalier, whose renown had been acquired by such ferocious cruelties and wanton butchery in the fields of Carolina. Could this indeed be the dreaded partisan who now spoke so softly and quietly, almost in a whisper, and whose manners were so grave—almost elegant?

But when the General spoke, the spy had regained his own demeanor.

“Well, my man, what is it?”

“You’re the boss, hyar, be you? Gin’ral Rawdon?”

“Yes, I suppose I might be called the ‘boss’,” laughed his lordship.

“Well, then, I’ve got a bit of news to tell you. Shall I speak out?”

“Certainly. I have no secrets from Colonel Tarleton.”

“Then hyar goes. You see I’m one o’ the right stripe—a lieutenant in Col. Potter’s ‘True Blues,’ an’ in a lettle scrimmage—what we hed with a gang o’ rebels, Bert Cheyne’s, they was—I got captered, and with a lot more, was tuck to the place whar thar ‘Swamp Fox,’ Marion hides. I hed a fri’nd thar, an’ he sot me free, an’ I left; but not ontel I’d got a purty cl’ar idee o’ how the ground lay, thar number, an’ sech like. Then I found out whar you was, an’ thought I’d come an’ let you know, so ’t you could make a raid on the cuss, ef so be you felt inclined.”

“How many do they number?” asked Rawdon, with an air of interest.

“They hedn’t more ’n two hundred, at the furdest.”

“What! where have they all gone to, then?”

“Gineral Gates has got ’em. He’d ’a’ tuck ’em all, on’y the rest hid in the swamp, till the rest was gone. I reckon old Foxy gi’n ’em the hint.”

“Whereabouts does the spot lay?”

“Hev you got a map?”

“Yes. Can you indicate the place on it?”

“Bet yer life, I kin! A heap better ’n I kin tell yer in words. Look hyar. You’re hyar—he’s *thar*, an’ my men is in this place. You kin foller a plain road ontel you’re ’ithin ten miles o’ his camp, an’ then a good guide kin take you cl’ar

thar. Ef you onc't surround him, he's clean gone, spite o' fate an' t'other feller," answered Coon, marking the route out upon a chart placed before him.

"What do you think, Bannister?" asked Rawdon, turning toward Tarleton.

"If he is what he says, and tells the truth, I say that it is glorious news. With my squadron, I would engage to trap this Swamp Fox as they call him, and his whole troop."

"You say you're a lieutenant in—"

"In Cap'n Potter's 'True Blues.' Jest so," promptly responded Coon.

"General," hastily added Tarleton, his face lighting up, "we will soon see if this is true. You remember the man that you saw yesterday? He is still in camp."

"Good! I recollect now. The name seemed familiar. Bring him here at once."

The counterfeit Hamlin heard these words with an ill-defined sense of impending danger, but his self-possession did not desert him for a moment. He trusted to escape by the aid of his ready wit and audacity, as he had done more than once before.

In a few minutes Tarleton reëntered, accompanied by a ragged, haggard-looking fellow, who stood in sullen silence.

"Now, my fellow," spoke Rawdon. "Look at this man, and tell me if you ever saw him before."

The dull, heavy eyes roved curiously over the form of Coon Rogers, and then sunk to the ground.

"No, I don't know him."

"You belong to Captain Potter's band?"

"Yas—I did—" began the Tory, when Coon interrupted him quickly.

He had divined the danger that threatened him, and resolved to face it boldly. So, with an air of contemptuous scorn, he uttered:

"Yes, you did untel you were whipped out o' the comp'ny. Steve Gamble, you're the same low dirty liar as you ever was. Not know *me*—Seth Hamlin, when I was the one 'at found you out? Git out, you car'on! You ain't fit to par' the toenails of a lame nigger!"

"You lie—I ain't Steve Gamble, nor you ain't Seth Hamlin,

nuther ! I know him like I do myself, an' he's a heap bigger man' 'n you be. Gin'ral, so help me Moses, he lies !" angrily exclaimed the Tory.

" I lie, do I—take *that*, you whelp you !" gritted Coon, as he sprung forward, and with one swinging hit of his clenched fist, hurled the man across the tent.

" I beg your pardon, Gin'ral," Rogers added quickly, as Rawdon sprung to his feet, " but raily I couldn't help it ; not ef I was to die for it the next minnit. He's the meanest, most triflin'est no 'count feller that ever shamed the shape o' human cretter. He was caught stealin' the bedclo'es off'n a sick woman, an' I had him whipped outen the comp'ny for it."

The two officers drew aside and consulted together for a few moments ; then Lord Rawdon resumed :

" You may be what you pretend, but we can not trust you without further proof. You will be kept under guard until we can learn how much there is in your words. Then if you prove all right, you will be well repaid for your inconvenience. But if you are not—then you shall see how we treat—*spies* !"

Coon made no answer, and the orderly was called and went with Rogers to the guard-house, where he was placed in solitary confinement.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAP TO CATCH—WHO ?

" GENERAL, you sent for me ?"

" Captain Cheyne—yes," thoughtfully replied the little, feeble-looking, sallow-complexioned man, glancing up from an unfolded paper that lay upon his lap. " Yes, I sent for you. How is your troop—I mean for service ?"

" Never better. They are already beginning to grumble at being here two whole days without any thing to liven them up. Trust me, sir, they will give good account of

themselves if there is any enemy to meet," warmly replied Bertram Cheyne.

"Then you can take the road in—how long?" asked Marion; for the little plain man was none other than the famous "Swamp Fox."

"In ten minutes."

"Good! but there is no need of such haste. Two or three hours from hence will do. Are you acquainted with the country to the north-east of this? Say twenty miles from here?"

"I know it but imperfectly. I was through it but once, and that years ago. As you know, I was raised further south-west."

"True; then you will need a guide. Luckily I have one," and as Marion spoke, he uttered a sharp, peculiar whistle, by placing two fingers in his mouth.

As if in answer to the signal, a man rapidly advanced from among the bushes that screened the camp of the Swamp Rangers from view of the spot where the partisan was sitting. Cheyne keenly eyed the new-comer, and an expression of puzzled doubt overspread his face.

It seemed as though he had ought to know this man; and his name appeared to tremble upon the very tip of his tongue, and then would glide back. Feeling confident that they had met before, at some time and place not very remote, he could not recall either.

The stranger was about the medium height, stoutly built and of dark complexion, dressed in a rude nondescript garb. He bore no visible weapons, but appeared a man well used to handle them, and if a useful friend, one equally to be dreaded as an enemy.

He approached and slightly touched the brim of his slouched hat to the General, after which he stood motionless in an erect position, telling undeniably that at some period of his lifetime he had been a soldier. Apparently he did not notice the young partisan, but there was a stealthy glance from the corner of his eye that Cheyne did not like.

"Captain," began Marion, "this is the man I alluded to. Ask him what questions you please."

"Well, my man, you have a name, I suppose? What is it?"

"I am called Carl Wicher, sir," responded the man, in a low and singularly musical tone.

"Just so. But what was your name when we met last? It was not that, else I should have recognized it," somewhat sternly added the young partisan.

"If we have ever met, captain, that was my name. I have but one," coolly replied Wicher. "But you must be mistaken. I never forget a face, and this is the first time I have ever seen yours."

"Where have you served?"

"Served?"

"Yes. In the army I mean. You have been a soldier. Your salute betrayed that."

"You are a close observer, captain. I *have* served. I was one of General Braddock's men when he was killed. Indeed, I came over from the old country with him."

"And now you are fighting against your own countrymen?" added Cheyne, suspiciously.

"No, sir. I was pressed into the army, but I am no Englishman. I am a Swiss."

"I think you may trust him, Cheyne. He brings me good recommendation from one I can trust, and he offers to do us a good service. There is a band of Tories secretly arming for active work, and he knows where they meet. To-night they are to receive arms and ammunition. He will conduct you to where you can surprise them, and capture the lot, with but little danger," explained Marion.

"How is that? Speak plain," added the young partisan, closely eying Wicher.

"Very well, sir. Then you must know that I am the second officer of a band of Tories who are arming to join Calvin Potter's command. They think I am one of their best and tried men. I learned of their purpose and entered it, intending to lead them into a trap. I can do it now."

"How many do they number?"

"At present only twenty-three, including myself. They meet to-night to arm themselves at a cabin some twenty miles from here, and then they march for the other band. I can lead you to the spot, and you can capture them all—if you are not afraid to trust me."

"I will trust you—but if you're caught trying to deceive me—! You understand?"

A shrug of the shoulders was Wicher's only reply. After some further discussion it was settled that Captain Cheyne should lead his command upon the expedition, guided by the spy, who seemed perfectly true and honest in his purpose.

And then, at about the middle of the afternoon, the little troop filed out of the encampment, in high glee at the prospect of again striking a blow at their enemies.

Followed by two-score men, Bertram rode beside Wicher, who appeared perfectly at ease, and truly did not wear the air of a man who meditated treachery. And yet the young partisan was not entirely at ease himself, for the thought that he had at some time met this man under different circumstances still assailed his mind, nor could he rid himself of the idea.

"What place is this that they rendezvous at?" asked the leader.

"It is—or rather *was*—the building of a fellow named Burns, but some persons killed him and carried off the women. No one has lived there since. It is an out-of-the-way place, and so the boys chose it as the safest spot to stow away their arms and ammunition in, and to meet there."

"How is it situated?"

"In a sort of swamp. There is only about ten acres of dry ground, and this is reached by a narrow strip of land that winds through the soft places. On this there is always kept a guard of one man, when the party meets. But if you will trust me—or if not, send one of your men along to guard me—I will settle him. Of course I know the passwords, and he won't suspect any thing. Then—a sharp knife and strong hand makes sure work," laughed Wicher, wickedly.

There was but little conversation indulged in during the ride, and several hours after sunset, Wicher signified that they were near their destination. For some time they had been riding through a swamp, along a narrow path or ridge of high ground, with the turbid pools of stagnant water upon either side of them.

"Well, captain," said the guide, "it will not be safe to ride

any further until the sentinel is disposed of. Shall I go alone, or will you send one of your men with me?"

"I will accompany you myself."

"But who will lead the men?"

"If all is right, I will whistle for them, and then they can come to where we are," decided Cheyne, his doubts increased by the objection of Wicher.

"Very well. Give them your instructions. There is no time to lose."

Cheyne quickly did so, and then dismounting he followed the lead of the guide, with a pistol, drawn and cocked, in his hand ready for use in case of treachery. As Wicher observed this action, he only smiled, and then advanced.

They had only proceeded one hundred yards or so when he paused and uttered the harsh, discordant cry of the screech-owl; an answer came almost immediately, from a little distance ahead of them.

"That is the guard. Now slouch your hat over your eyes, and let me do the talking. If he sees that a stranger is along, he will give an alarm that will send our game into the swamp; and then we'll have had our ride for nothing," whispered the guide, in a low, guarded tone.

Cheyne followed his advice, and the man's tone of truthfulness in a manner disarmed his suspicions, until he began to believe that he had wronged Wicher in entertaining them. Then when at the spot where the reply-screech had sounded, they paused.

Wicher removed his hat and upturned his face where a ray of moonlight fully revealed his features, and then said:

"Who is it upon guard to-night? You, Mobley?"

"Yas'ir," replied a voice, and then a tall form uprose from among a clump of bushes. "You're late, lieutenant."

"Yes, but I couldn't help it. How many are here?"

Just then Cheyne fancied that he heard a slight splashing in the water, close behind him, and instantly turned his head, fearing that treachery was at work. Scarcely had he done so when the man called Mobley sprung forward and clasped him around the body, thus securing Cheyne's arms tightly to his side.

In the suddenness of the attack, his pistol was knocked

from his grasp, and falling in the soft mud, failed to explode. He strove to cry out and alarm his men, but Wicher instantly clutched him by the throat, thus effectually checking all outcry.

Beneath their united strength, the powerful form of the young partisan was dragged backward, to the ground. Still he did not tamely submit, without a desperate struggle; it was not his nature to do so.

But he was taken at a deadly disadvantage, and although he exerted his immense strength to the utmost to free himself from his treacherous enemies, all was in vain. The deadly clutch at his throat increased in its grip, and he was rapidly weakening beneath its pressure. He gave a convulsive shudder and lost all consciousness.

The treacherous spy, when fully assured of this, relaxed his hold and arose, panting and wiping the perspiration from his brow. Then some cords were promptly produced from the bush where the sentinel had lain concealed, with which the unconscious settler was firmly bound and gagged.

"*That's* done, anyhow! The cursed fool was as strong as a bull! Help me put him into the bushes out of the way, and then for the rest," muttered Wicher. "How is it? Are the boys all ready?"

"Yes. They're hid along the road. How many of them is thar?"

"Forty; but we can handle them. I'll call them up."

Wicher placed his fingers to his mouth, uttering a low whistle, and then listened anxiously. He did not know but what Cheyne might have had some peculiar signal that he could not hope to imitate successfully.

But then a wicked smile settled over his face, and a vicious glitter shone in his eyes as he distinguished the faint splashing of horses' hoofs.

The partisans were walking blindly into the trap!

CHAPTER V.

THE TRAP SPRUNG.

As we have seen, Calvin Potter was foiled in his plan of abducting Esther Carew, by the abrupt appearance of Bertram Cheyne. At heart ever a craven, the Tory was doubly a coward where the young partisan was concerned, ever since the occurrence hinted at by the lady.

As he eluded the hissing blade of the patriot, he thought only of flight, and plunging into the bushes he darted through the swamp at full speed, until he was several miles distant from the scene of conflict. Then realizing that he was not pursued, he moderated his pace, wiping the perspiration and splashes of mud from his face.

Suddenly he was startled by hearing the splashing of horses' feet in the miry mud, and fearing lest the comer might be Cheyne, Potter crouched low down in the midst of a clump of bushes, where he was half-buried in the mud. Scarcely had he done so when the horseman appeared, riding in a course that must bring him within a dozen yards of the ambush.

A look of wonder overspread the features of the Tory as he recognized in the rider, the man whom he had left a prisoner in his camp. It was undoubtedly the same, and yet the expression—the demeanor was so utterly different.

Then a fierce glitter filled the eyes of Potter, as he muttered a name that grated harshly through his clenched teeth. He knew that his most deadly foe had bearded him in his very stronghold, and had escaped scot free.

But then he threw up his rifle, and cocking it, glanced quickly along the dark tube until the sights bore full upon the temple of the rebel spy. The trigger was touched—the hammer fell—a tiny shower of sparks was the only result.

His rifle had flashed in the pan! The powder had become wet during his headlong flight through the swamp.

And then his foe was upon him. Potter had no choice, but sunk at full length down into the soft clinging ooze that closed over his body like a blanket.

The hoofs of the swamp scout's pony fairly brushed the head of the concealed Tory, but he was not discovered. And then believing that his fancy had deceived him, Coon Rogers rode on, just as the Tory was forced to raise his head, to draw breath.

Remaining thus until assured that his foe was at a safe distance, Potter arose and shook his clenched fist menacingly after the spy, and then regaining the rifle that had played him false, he once more hastened toward the island where he had left his men, his breast filled with direful hatred and passions.

Arriving there, he hastily collected them and set out, hoping to capture one if not both of his enemies. As we have seen, he failed; Cheyne also outspeeding them. When once more at the camp his first action was to call for Jared Cowley, who had been missing when the party set out.

"Hyar I be, cap'n," responded that worthy, not in the best of humors, for Jim Garvin had fleeced him most unmercifully in their "little game," and had been indulging in a nap since.

"Where's the fellow you was told to guard?"

"He's over thar, asleep—no, durned ef he is! But he *was* on'y a minnit sence. He cain't be fur off," stammered the Tory, scratching his head dolefully, as he saw that the prisoner was not in the spot where he had lain down.

"You needn't look, you cursed fool!" angrily cried Potter, his eyes glowing with rage. "You've let him escape, and for a grain of salt I'd blow your stupid brains out—if you have any!"

"Mebbe you'd better try it on," muttered Cowley, his dull eyes lighting up and one hand seeking his belt.

"What's that?"

"I say that ef you try it, you'd best make a shore shot, fur *then* it'd be *my* turn. Two-kin play at that leetle game, I reckon. You needn't try to put on none o' your highfalutin' a'rs towards *me*, 'ca'se I won't stand 'em. I don't b'long to your comp'ny, an' I'm jest as good as you *dar'* be, any day. Ef it's a muss, jest say the word, an' I'm yer man," defiantly added the Tory.

"Well, let it pass. You are not one of my men, or I'd shoot you down like a dog!" slowly added Potter, his cheek

paling before the steady glare of Cowley, and glad of an excuse to draw out of the difficulty, without openly showing the white feather. "Hamlin ought not to have given you the charge."

"Jest so. An' now that you talk like a white man 'd order, I'm sorry that I didn't watch the skunk closter. But he 'peared so contented like, an' I got to playin' keards a'ter he laid down, an' plum fergot all about him," responded Jared.

"Well, never mind it now. Carl Wicher, come with me. I wish to speak to you," added Potter, turning away, followed by the man addressed.

"Wicher, my boy, how would you like to be lieutenant of the band?"

"Why do you ask? Hamlin has that place," moodily replied the soldier.

"*Had*, you mean."

"What!"

"Just so. Hamlin is dead and so is Clutter. We were attacked by a squad of rebels led by that infernal Cheyne, and I had a close squeeze for it, while the boys were rubbed out. Now you know I can give you the place by a word, and I will, besides adding fifty pounds of good yellow gold, if you will promise one thing."

"If I can do it."

"Then place this Cheyne in my power; *alive*, mind you, for I have a little job that *he* must assist me in, before I end him outright."

"If I can, I will do it," promptly replied the Tory.

And then the scoundrels matured their plans, although several days were consumed in gaining the necessary information. We have already seen how Wicher performed the first portion of his work, and will revert once more to them.

We left the young partisan at the moment he was overpowered and bound, and when the patriot band had begun advancing still further into the meshes of the net, in obedience to the shrill whistle from the traitor guide.

When the leading horseman had advanced within the sight of Wicher in the gloom, that worthy leveled his rifle and, with a deadly aim, fired. The doomed patriot sunk forward

upon his horse's neck, with a hollow groan, the death-dealing bullet having pierced his brain.

This was the preconcerted signal, and the sides of the road seemed literally lined with fire, as nearly two score of rifles vomited forth their contents, and at such close quarters—scarce half a score of yards—the result could be nothing else than deadly in the extreme.

Not a bullet but what found its mark, and naught saved the partisans from total annihilation but the fact of several aiming at the same man. Then a series of wild yells rung forth from the swamp, and the exultant Tories rushed from their coverts to complete the work so direfully begun.

But they were not to conquer without a struggle. Those who opposed them were the bravest of the brave; men who courted danger as a pastime, and who carried their lives in the hollow of their hands.

Knowing that to remain would be death, and yet determining to strike one strong blow for revenge, the rebels met their foes hand to hand, after pouring in one deadly volley from their rifles, that created sad havoc in the closely-crowded ranks of the Tories.

Then came the clash of steel as sabers met—there were the hoarse yells of rage and fury—there were the shouts and curses of pain as some keen weapon tore its way through the sensitive flesh; the groans of death-agony—the screams of some tortured horse—the quick trampling of feet, and the dull, heavy *thud* as some lifeless form fell to the mother earth.

Then the little band burst through the cordon of enemies and dashed away through the swampy recesses, separating and each seeking safety in the direction he most fancied. And after them poured the triumphant Tories, eager for more blood, raging like demons over the dread carnival.

Many a thrilling scene and tragic *rencontre* then ensued in those gloomy wilds, and over the country for miles were scattered here and there a still and ghastly form, the victims of a fratricidal strife.

But it is not our purpose to describe these. Other scenes closely concerning our more prominent characters claim our attention.

Carl Wicher and Mobley, as soon as the rebels had fled, returned to the spot where they had left Bertram Cheyne, and found him still senseless. The former was anxious, fearing that he had killed the young ranger, but then feeling that his heart still throbbed, though but faintly, he loosened and removed the gag from his widely-distended jaws.

"Give us a lift, Mobley, and let's carry him up to the house. We will bring him to there," said Wicher, and then the two men carried the senseless body along the narrow path and up to the small, dilapidated log-shanty.

Entering the building they placed Cheyne upon a rude bed, and then striking a light, began trying to restore him to consciousness. For a time their efforts were futile, but then the eyes of the partisan opened, and glancing wildly around him, he muttered:

"What is this—where am I?"

"Ah, ha! so you've concluded to speak, have you?" chuckled Wicher, exultingly. "I thought you were going to make a die of it, just for spite, and to rob me of my hard-earned reward."

"You here—you treacherous whelp? Oh, how blind I was, to trust in your word!" bitterly cried Cheyne, as he recognized the false-hearted guide.

A wild, ungovernable sense of fury came over him as he realized how he had been duped, and at the thought of his devoted followers—had they too suffered from his blind incaution? The partisan exerted all his powerful strength to burst the bonds that secured him, but in vain, and at length he fell back upon the bed, breathless and exhausted by his strenuous exertions.

The two Tories stood by, watching his futile struggles, with malicious pleasure. Then Carl Wicher spoke:

"You seem very restless, captain; I fear we will have to give you a sleeping potion unless you restrain your emotion a little better."

"Unloose my hands—or even one of them, and I'll put you beyond all need of sleeping potions!" hissed Cheyne.

"Bah! that *would* be smart, I must say! No, no, I would receive nothing for you then, while now you are worth fifty pounds to me. You ought to feel flattered at the price.

"There are not many rebels who would bring so much, I'm thinking," laughed Wicher. "But why don't you ask about your men?"

"Because, I know that if there was any good news—for me, I mean—you would be careful to keep it secret; and if bad, you will be only too glad to boast of it, of your own free will."

"Pointed and logical, I must admit. Well, I will not make you out a liar, so I tell you that about thirty of your followers lay out yonder upon the trail, and the rest are fleeing for dear life through the swamps with about two score men upon their tracks. Are you mathematician enough to reckon up the number who will be left, after this night's work, of your brag company?" laughed Wicher, malignantly.

"If they die, it is as brave men should—a pity that it was not *by* the hands of brave men, instead of cowardly assassins who feared to face them. Bah! I would rather a thousand times be in the place of any of them than to stand in your shoes, this moment!" contemptuously added Bertram.

"All's fair in war, you know. But why don't you ask who it is that prized your company so highly that he is willing to give fifty pounds to enjoy it?"

"I neither know nor care—some dirty scoundrel like yourself, I suppose."

"Go on—as only your tongue is free, you have the right to use it as you please, I presume. But perhaps you'd do well to remember that my temper is none of the best, and I may take a notion to clap a stopper upon it. If you spit the venom of a snake, you ought also to have the *spit tongue*," significantly retorted Wicher, his cheek flushing and a vicious light glowing in his eyes. "But never mind that now, I will tell you this friend's name—a very particular one, by the way. Calvin Potter, is his name."

"Ha! then it is as I thought! I knew that I had met you before—you are one of his miscreants!"

"Well yes; that's Latin for *loyalist*, I suppose. But really, captain, I can not compliment you upon your memory. I was the one who gave you that little touch upon the sword-arm, the morning you paid us such a cordial visit—remember?"

Cheyne did not reply. His thoughts were bitter and gloomy enough, without the taunts of the traitor spy. Not alone for himself did he feel so sad and despondent, but he felt for his men.

He knew that they must have been ambushed and worsted severely, else had he never been abandoned a prisoner in the enemies' hands. They were men bound to him by strong ties of friendship, endeared by the toils and hardships which they had undergone for the good cause. Many of them were personal friends before the war, who had flocked to his side when he called for volunteers; those with whom he had sported in childhood, or elder men who had petted him as a bright, brave boy, when peace reigned throughout the land.

And now — they were lying dead, perchance mangled, gasping away their last breath of life, helpless and alone, save the dread companionship of their slain friends, or the brutal jeers of those who had caused their death. Men who were of the same country — the same blood, and who ought to have been cordial friends, instead of relentless enemies.

An unconscious groan of agony was wrung from the pallid lips of the young partisan, as these bitter reflections flashed across his mind, for he felt that had he been more cautious, all this might have been avoided.

But *was* he to blame? Did not General Marion trust this man, and overrule all his objections? Could he have acted other than he did?

Just then a mud-bespattered man entered the house and spoke to Wicher.

"The boys hev all come in, leftenant."

"All?"

"Yas. Leastways, all that 'll ever come in o' thar own v'cord. Thar's thirteen who won't never ride with us any more."

"So many? Well, tell them to get ready for a march. We must be far away from here before day, for that cursed Swamp Fox will hunt the country over but what he 'll have revenge upon us for fooling him so badly. Go, and bid them make haste," hurriedly ordered Wicher.

The man left the room, followed by Mobley. Then Wicher turned to Cheyne:

"Now, captain, you are a brave man, and I should hate to treat you anyways disrespectful, so if you will promise—give me your word of honor as a soldier and a gentleman—not to attempt to escape until day, I will not bind or gag you. Will you do it?"

"I have nothing to say to such as you. You have proved yourself a cowardly liar, as well as a traitor, and you may do as you will. I shall promise nothing."

"So be it then. You'll only have a rougher time of it; that's all. I'm bound to take you in safe, if I have to carry you every step of the way upon my back. But look ye, and mind, I do not often go back upon my word. If we meet any enemies—*your* friends—sooner than lose you, I'll send a bullet through your skull! So carry yourself straight," brutally replied the Tory.

In a short time Mobley returned with three horses, and the partisan was lifted into the saddle and securely bound. A strong cord fastened his feet, running beneath the horse's belly; another was wound around his waist and tied to the pommel of the saddle, while his hands were tied behind his back.

"Now remember what I said, my friend. I'll leave your mouth free while you behave yourself, but no longer. At the first cry you utter I'll gag you, and if you give any more trouble, then I'll do as I said before."

"You have the power now. But the time may come when I will have a chance to repay you. Rest assured I will do so—and with interest into the bargain!" bitterly said Cheyne.

"I hope you will—when *that* time comes," laughed Wicher, as he sprung into the saddle. "Come, boys, we must get out of here in a hurry. Follow me, and keep your weapons ready. Forward!"

The little troop of spoil-laden Tories rode rapidly away after their leader, soon leaving the scene of the massacre behind them. And along through the swamp there glided one whom they did not perceive.

On foot he glided through the mire, with steps as active and noiseless as those of the velvet-footed panther, his eyes glittering with a deadly light as they were riveted upon the horsemen. Despite their speed, he kept pace with them, seemingly as tireless as though he were a steam automaton.

CHAPTER VI.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

THE reflections of Coon Rogers were not the most pleasant imaginable, when he heard the heavy door of the guard-house close behind him, and then being barred. His well-laid plans had miscarried by the unexpected appearance of the Tory, and he now deeply regretted having availed himself of the dead man's papers, although at the time it appeared better than relying upon his bare word. With them he could apparently show that he was what he represented, but this unfortunate occurrence had foiled him.

He did not know how they were to put his words to the test, unless by sending out a spy to the American camp, as indicated by him, and if they did so, the messenger would have to search long ere he made the discovery. But might they not send for Calvin Potter?

A deep frown settled upon the scout's features at this thought. He knew that it was very probable, for while in the Tory camp he had learned that Potter intended to join Tarleton, if possible, and were his services accepted.

Were he brought forward—and Coon had rightly indicated the spot where the band might be found, the other dot indicating the island occupied by Cheyne—there could be but one result. Convicted of being a spy, he would be doomed to death—to be hung as had young Nathan Hall.

He saw that he must escape, and at the earliest possible moment, but how? Alone and unaided, he could scarcely hope for such a thing; it seemed impossible.

He closely and thoroughly examined the room in which he had been confined. It was a stone building, with walls of considerable thickness, and the one narrow window was secured by thick iron bars. No hope of escape *there*.

The door was of oak, heavily studded with wrought-iron nails, and firmly set upon huge hinges. The floor was of closely-laid stones, set in mortar.

Even did he succeed in loosening these, and digging a tunnel beneath the walls, there was the guard to elude, besides the regular sentinels posted around the town. Clearly he was in a perilous situation.

Still Coon did not despair, but set his wits to work, trying to devise some mode by which he might effect his freedom. In the haste of his imprisonment, his weapons had been left him, but of what service could they be to him there?

The remainder of the day and then the night passed away, and still he had not decided upon any course. He had been interrupted only once, by a soldier who brought him a bountiful supper. Clearly they did not mean to starve him, Coon thought, as he devoured the greater portion of the food, with ravenous appetite.

The second day passed, and night again came. Scarcely had Coon dispatched his supper when the door again opened and four men entered, one of them quickly igniting a lamp.

They were Lord Rawdon, Bannister Tarleton, Ralph Earley—the Tory whose evidence had so damaged Coon—and *Calvin Potter!*

The worst fears of the spy had been but too well founded. The Tory leader had sought out Tarleton, and making him the offer of his band, told his name. Then, after a consultation with Rawdon, he had been brought to identify the prisoner.

"This is the man," said Rawdon. "Do you know him?"

"Yes," promptly replied Potter, with a malignant grin at Coon.

"Who is he—your lieutenant?"

"No; for the best of reasons. Seth Hamlin is dead—has been for three or four days past. But his papers, among them his commission, were stolen from his body. If this man has them, then I accuse him of being the murderer."

"If not your officer, then who is he?"

"He is a fellow known as Coon Rogers, a sort of scout and spy in the service of Marion, the Swamp Fox."

"Are you certain?"

"I will swear to it."

"What have you to say to say to this?" demanded Rawdon, turning to the prisoner, who put a bold face upon the bad affair, and lied glibly:

"That he lies. I am no more Coon Rogers than he is himself. He is my enemy, because I chance to stand better in the graces of a certain fair lady than he does, and because I once called him a coward for skulking behind a tree while we were fighting Cheyne's rough riders."

"Ask Ralph Earley yonder which one of us lies the most," added Potter, quietly.

"*This* is my cap'n. T'other is a liar," promptly replied the Tory, with a malignant scowl at Coon.

"It is enough. I see that you are a spy, as I all along expected. And to show you that I never break my word, you shall hang at sunrise to-morrow. It is a pity to afford you so much grace, but it is dark now, and would be too much trouble," coldly pronounced Rawdon.

"And I regret deeply that I shall not be able to be present to soothe your last moments, and take any little message you may wish to send that 'certain fair lady,' but I must leave to-night," sneeringly added Potter.

"There—no more," sternly reproved Rawdon. "It is no credit to you, this jeering a doomed man. Come, Bannister, let's go finish our rubber."

The quartette departed, leaving Coon Rogers to his own company, in the dark. But deep as was the gloom, that which clouded his heart was still more intense.

It looked as though his fate was assuredly sealed. To die at sunrise—to be hung!

But near as seemed this fearful death, an equally great danger threatened him still nearer at hand.

It took the shape of Ralph Earley, the Tory whom Coon had struck, such a deadly blow. This man was an enemy to be dreaded, because he was not a person to openly face one whom he hated. His creed was like that of the copperhead snake; to strike a deadly blow without warning and without sound.

He had vowed to kill the man who had disgraced him—not so much the blow, as the falsehood regarding the sick woman—and ever since had been maturing his plans. This

night was the one he had decided upon that should witness his bloody satisfaction.

True, he knew that if left alone, his enemy must die at sunrise, but in his opinion that was not sufficient. He must deal the blow himself, or remain forever dishonored.

And now he set about carrying out his well-matured plan. The night was dark and stormy, and favored its execution.

He knew the man whose duty it was to guard the building during the first part of the night, and had learned his weak point—a love for ardent spirits—and was fully prepared for the task. He stealthily glided up within ear-shot of the sentry, and then called his name in a low tone.

"Who is it—what do want?" demanded the guard, unconsciously imitating his visitor, and speaking softly.

"Me—Ralph Earley, you know. I've brought you a sup o' somethin' warm to keep you dry in all this 'ere wet."

"Good! you *are* a friend indeed, Earley. Come up and let's see what it is," eagerly replied the other.

Earley advanced and produced a capacious bottle, handing it to the sentry. That worthy eagerly grasped the flask, and uncorking it, placed the neck or the orifice beneath his huge mustache, allowing the potent liquor to gurgle in a stream down his throat. Then drawing a long breath, he smacked his lips and said:

"Bless you, Earley, you're the best man I've met for a long time. That was prime—where did you get it?"

"Oh, I have a private still," laughed the Tory. "But here, man, take a *drink*—that was only a *taste*!"

"After you is manners."

"All right. Your health, and lots of it," quoth Earley, going through the motions; but not a drop passed beyond his tongue; he knew the secret of its manufacture too well for that.

This time the soldier did not lower the bottle until he almost choked for want of breath when he did so; it was in silence. He had drank enough of the poisoned stuff to have killed a dozen men.

The treacherous Tory closely eyed him, and then seeing that he reeled, he deftly caught the musket that fell from the

nerveless hand and then eased his victim to the ground, with a fierce, diabolical chuckle of delight. His work had begun promisingly!

Then he drew his long knife and removed the bars. Opening the door barely wide enough to admit his person, he shut it quickly behind him. At the same moment a strong hand clutched him by the throat and a bony fist dealt him a fearful blow between the eyes that crushed in his skull, thick as it was.

The prisoner had heard the challenge of the guard, and listening intently to see who was approaching, had distinguished the tone of the Tory. When he heard the words that followed, he suspected the truth and prepared for the struggle.

He heard the dying groan of the unfortunate sentinel, and then, as the bars were removed, he took up his station behind the door. When the Tory entered, his form was plainly outlined against the lighter sky, and Coon seized him as described.

Kneeling upon the senseless form of the murderer, Coon raised his knife to deal the finishing blow, but then he paused and returned the weapon to its sheath. It seemed too much like murder, and he could not deal the stroke.

Then quickly tearing strips from the Tory's dress, he securely bound him, and then fastened a gag between his jaws. Rolling him aside he opened the door and emerged into the open air, with a silent prayer of thanksgiving for his almost miraculous preservation from a double danger.

Coon could just distinguish the prostrate form of the soldier, and bent over him to secure his musket and ammunition. One hand inadvertently touched the unfortunate man's face, and the scout started back with an involuntary cry of horror.

There was no mistaking that peculiar clammy touch for aught other than a corpse, when it has once been felt. Although he had heard the groan, Coon had not thought of this; he supposed that Earley had stunned him in some way in order to gain admittance. But to drink with a man in apparent good fellowship, and then slay him!

More than ever the scout felt inclined to return and end the career of this dastardly wretch at once, but he put aside the temptation, muttering.

"No, I would not have my hand stained with such carnage as *he* is. Besides, he will meet his deserts in the morning, anyhow. They can try their hanging experiment on *him* instead of me; it would be a pity to disappoint them entirely."

Coon closed the door and replaced the bars, after which he stood the fast-stiffening corpse up, propping it against the wall in such a manner that it appeared lifelike, until closely scrutinized. He had possessed himself of the dead soldier's musket and affixed bayonet, and his cartridge-box; besides these he still possessed his own knife and pistols, that had been overlooked during the last visit of the General.

Coon uttered a low chuckle as he strode away, picturing to himself the surprise of Lord Rawdon when he should find that his prisoner had suddenly changed identity during the night. He knew that the truth would instantly be suspected.

The dead sentry, the bottle of poisoned whisky beside him—although of this Coon had no knowledge—the Tory inside, bound and gagged, with knife beside him; the original prisoner gone and having secured the door behind him—all this would tell its own tale, and the scout knew the fate of his would-be murderer would be the same as that promised him.

"It must be late, and they change guards soon, when they must find out the mischief. I must get out of this before then, or I may have to fight for it, after all. And yet I would like to take a run through the town, just to gain an idea of how many they number. But will I have time? Confound the clouds! If I could only catch a glimpse of the moon, now, it would be all right. Never mind; I'll take a little turn anyhow, and trust to luck," he added, resolutely, and then set off at a rapid, but steady, pace.

But he had not gone far when he became convinced of the folly of his course. The night was so dark that he could gain no knowledge of importance, or that could be relied upon, and then he ran the risk of running upon some troublesome customer.

Coon had resolved to give over the attempt and make the best of his way out of the town, when he suddenly ran against a man, just as he turned the corner of a house. The

collision well-nigh felled them both, and Coon's musket fell with a little metallic clatter to the ground.

"Hollo, my man, who are you that are out so late?" demanded a stern voice, that Rogers fancied he recognized as that of Lord Rawdon. "Did you not hear the tattoo?"

Coon did not speak, but shot out his terrible left fist, the blow taking effect in the pit of the officer's stomach and doubling him up in a half-senseless heap. Then clutching his musket the spy turned and ran lightly down the street, it being the same one by which he had entered the town.

He had not fled a hundred yards ere he heard the voice of Lord Rawdon shouting the alarm, and then came the rattle of arms as the sentinels started up in active attention. Coon heard the word passing along the inner line of sentries, not far distant from him, and knew that he would be forced to run the gantlet, or else suffer capture.

This latter clause was not for a moment to be thought of, and knowing that every instant now gained might be the means of preserving him from a shameful and ignominious death, Coon crouched low down to the ground and glided with wondrously silent celerity along in the gloom, until he knew that he was past the inner cordon. But there were yet two more.

And now the tumult increased within the village, and lights were rapidly flickering to and fro through the streets. Then came a loud cry of surprise, mingled with horror, telling the scout that the dead sentinel had been discovered.

He waited for no more, but dashed down the road at a rapid pace, until the spot was neared where he had been challenged as Lieutenant Hamlin. When he proceeded more leisurely, until the sudden order met his ear:

"Halt!—who goes there?"

"Your commander," quickly replied Coon, closely imitating the tones of Lord Rawdon, and approaching the sentinel. "Has there been a man down this way during the last five minutes? The rebel spy has managed to escape, somehow, and I saw him take this direction."

"There has been no one past me," promptly replied the sentinel, thrown off his guard by the reply of Coon, and fancying that he recognized the tones of his General.

"Who are you, my man?" asked Rogers, still advancing until within arm's length of the soldier.

"I am—ah!"

The sentence died away in a gurgling groan as the powerful arms of the rebel plunged his armed musket forward, the sharp bayonet entering the Englishman's throat, and passing back of the ear, killing him almost instantly.

It was a fearful deed, but the scout did not falter. Death awaited him behind, and this man was an obstacle to his escape that could be removed in no other way. Had Coon attempted to pass by him, he would have suspected the truth and either shot him or else given the alarm.

The blood of the hunted fugitive was now fully aroused, and he would escape did he have to wade knee-deep in blood. But such was not to be the case.

There was only one more sentinel to be passed, along the road, before he could enter the swamp, and once there, Coon knew that he would be safe, for that night, at least. So he glided silently along the road, keeping a watchful eye upon either side of him.

But despite his precaution, Rogers was discovered by the keen-eyed, watchful sentry. And from one side of the road, almost opposite him rung out a challenge to halt.

There was no time for the scout to attempt his former ruse, even had he deemed it advisable, for the lights were rapidly advancing down the road toward him. So, with a half-stifled curse, he bent his head and dashed forward at breakneck speed.

A loud report rung out, and the spy felt a sharp, stinging pain along his left shoulder, that told him he was wounded. But he knew that it was nothing more serious than a mere "crease," that acted as a spur does upon a jaded but fiery horse; it increased his pace.

For some minutes he sped on at a flying rate, with the heavy tramp of the pursuing sentinel behind him; but then this gradually died away, as the soldier was distanced. Then plunging into the woods, Coon continued his flight at a more leisurely rate.

He knew right well that the search after him would be hot and persistent, if only for the insult he had put upon Lord Rawdon, by dealing him that dexterous blow. Then there

was the slain sentinel, in addition, with the fact of his being a convicted spy.

But having succeeded thus far, in passing through the greater danger, Coon felt confident that his good fortune would not desert him, and felt comparatively at ease. He knew that the soldiers would not stand the slightest chance of overtaking him in the swamp, especially at night, although the woods would be thoroughly scoured.

For that, however, he did not care. These were not the paths he would seek to gain safety in, and he could easily lie concealed during the day, if necessary, and travel only at night, until he had gained those swampy recesses where the British would not dare penetrate in quest of him.

CHAPTER VII.

ACHSA, THE SWAMP WITCH.

THE Tory band, led by Carl Wicher, rode rapidly along through the swamp, until broad daylight, when they entered a more fertile section of the country. By the side of the leader, rode Bertram Cheyne, the young partisan, now a captive.

The thoughts of the soldier were gloomy enough; there was not a ray of hope to be seen, and alone he could not hope to escape from the toils that were gathered around him. He had for a time believed that the Tories would be attacked by such of his men as had survived the ambuscade, in hope of rescuing their loved leader.

But such did not come, and Cheyne was forced to believe the worst. That his band had been annihilated.

He knew that he was in the power of one of Calvin Potter's emissaries, and that he might as well expect mercy from a starving panther as the Tory leader, were he once fairly within his power. There was a long and heavy debt placed against his name in the memory of Potter, that naught save blood could liquidate.

At length—some hours after day-dawn—the Tory band once

more entered the swamp, and after riding several miles paused before a dilapidated story-and-a-half log-house, situated upon a knoll in the center of a clearing of perhaps fifty acres. This had evidently been once under cultivation, but had been suffered to run to waste, and was now covered with a tall growth of weeds and shrubbery.

That the building was inhabited, a tiny curl of smoke floating upward from the wide chimney-top, plainly testified. And equally as plain, these, whoever they might be, were no strangers to Wicher, for riding up to the door he dismounted, calling in a loud tone :

“ Achsa, you old beldame, why don't you come ? ”

“ Be a little more chary of your epithets, my fine gentleman, or you will have the ten commandments nearer your mind than they ever were before—I'll write them on your ugly face with my finger-nails ! ” screeched a shrill cracked voice, as the sound of shuffling footsteps were heard approaching the door.

The figure of an old woman appeared ; old if we judge from her silvery hair, and bent form. It was a strangely weird sight, this Achsa, as Wicher had called her, or the “ Witch of the Swamp,” as many called her, together with other equally as complimentary titles.

In marked contrast to her snowy white hair, her eyes were full and of a peculiarly brilliant blackness. Her complexion and face were those of a woman not more than thirty years of age at the utmost, clear and unfaded ; the cheeks plump and smooth ; the lips red and pouting ; the teeth still white and regular.

Her form, though bent, was one that must have been unusually tall and commanding before premature decay had misshaped it. Her features throughout proclaimed what her name had hinted ; that she was a Jewess.

Who she was, where she had come from, or her name, other than Achsa, none knew. Or if they knew, would not tell. She had appeared suddenly, and how she gained her living, was a mystery in perfect keeping with the rest.

“ Never mind that now, old woman,” impatiently returned Wicher. “ I've brought you a boarder to keep until the captain gets back. This man you see.”

"And who is he? By his face and form I should say he was a Cheyne. It is Beverly Cheyne in his youthful days!"

"You are right. He is a Cheyne. But how is this, Achsa? You speak of the old man—are they friends of yours, then?" suspiciously added Carl, keenly eying the woman.

"Friends!" she echoed, bitterly. "Yes—friends, such as the wolf to the lamb—the hawk to the dove! Night and day for the past twenty-five years I have cursed the very name—I curse them now, root and branch!"

"Good! then you will be a better guard than I thought for. This young fellow stands in the captain's way, and after he enjoys a little sport with him, why Potter will probably make him a present of a rope—understand?"

"I do. Bring him in. I will watch him night and day—he shall never leave my sight until I witness his last struggle! Bring him in, good Carl. He will be safe here. I don't have many visitors—ha! ha! They fear the witch of the swamp!—The fools!"

Wicher and Mobley removed the cords that bound Cheyne to his horse, at the same time carefully guarding against any attempt at escape. Then they forced the young partisan to enter the house, and followed the beldame up a rickety flight of stairs. Achsa placed a chair near the low-ceiled room, and Cheyne was ordered to occupy it.

Knowing that resistance would be useless and only call forth more brutal treatment, Bertram did as he was bade, and then they bound him firmly to the chair. Achsa, with a fiendish chuckle, adroitly flung a rope over a stout hook that was fastened in one of the smoke-begrimed rafters, and then placed a noose around the partisan's neck.

"What are you going to do with that Achsa?" cried Wicher, arresting her hand. "Mind you, he must not be injured before Potter comes. If you should hang him and thus spoil Cal's plans, I would not give a counterfeit penny for your lease of life!"

"Never fear—I will not harm him; only tickle him a little and give him a slight foretaste of what he may expect when that time does come. Then I can sit over him, and if he makes any move or attempt to escape, I can check him easily," was the indignant reply.

"Very well; but I won't trust you too far. I will leave the most of the boys here, and they will watch you. So beware! I will give them orders to shoot you like a dog if necessary. So don't attempt to play any of your tricks," warningly replied Wicher.

Then the party descended from the loft, leaving Cheyne to his reflections, which were bitter enough. Wicher gave his orders to the men, and then rode off with a portion of them, leaving perhaps a dozen at the lone building.

Scarcely had he disappeared, when Achsa stole softly up the stairs, and drawing a chair up before Bertram, clutched the rope that hung round his neck, and giving it a violent jerk, almost drew him from the floor.

"There, now, wake up and look at me. Do you know who I am?"

"I could tell you better *what* you are!" angrily replied Cheyne.

"And whose fault is it? Who made me what I am?" hissed the beldame, her eyes glowing like living coals.

"Yourself and your own evil passions."

"A lie—a base lie! It was your father—Beverly Cheyne, Esquire," with a bitter emphasis upon the name. "*He* brought me to this. I loved him once—oh! how dearly I loved him! But that is gone now. That love is changed to hate—hatred for him and his. And I hate *you* more than all—more than I even do *his* memory. Shall I tell you why?"

There was a strange fascination in the burning glance that Achsa fixed upon the young partisan, that seemed to chill his very heart. His gaze was riveted upon those wondrous eyes, with a sensation akin to the magnetism one feels at the rays from a serpent's eyes. Almost unconsciously Bertram bowed his head in assent.

"I will tell you then. It is because you are *his* son —and *mine*!"

"It is a falsehood—a base, black lie! *You* my— Bah! I am a fool for getting angry at the idiotic babblings of a crazy hag," contemptuously replied Bertram.

"Ha! ha! loving words for a son to address to his *mother*! Truly, we are a well matched pair. But believe it or not, it is the simple truth. And I will convince you of it. I do not

ask you to listen to me—you can not help yourself! You can not stop your ears. I can make you look me full in the face by a touch of this rope. And now listen.

“It is nearly thirty years ago that I first met your father—Beverly Cheyne. At that time I was young—not yet twenty—the only child of wealthy parents, and lovely in form and feature as a *houri*. I can well afford to say that now. There is little trace of either left, but I was proud and very vain of my beauty then. It proved a curse instead of a blessing. Better far had I been hideously deformed.

“Your father met me, and my beauty strongly attracted him. But my parents forbade my receiving his attentions, because he did not belong to our sect; he was a Christian; we were Jews. But that did not prevent our meeting frequently, and I learned to love the serpent better than life—better than my soul! He vowed that he returned my passion. We were both young and hot-blooded, and—you can guess the result.

“But he fled and left me, and I knew nothing of him for months. Then I learned that he lived in New York city, and left my house to follow him. And then I learned the truth. That he was already married—that he had a wife when he first met me! For a time this blow almost killed me, but then I vowed to live *for vengeance!*

“*You* were born, and within a week *his wife* also had a son. I soon managed to gain over the nurse that attended Mrs. Cheyne, and as she was poor, while I had an abundance of money, one night we changed infants, leaving *my* child—*you*, in place of the rightful one. What happened during the next year, I know not, for I became crazy in reality.

“When I awoke to reason once more, I was at home. I asked for the child. They told me that it was gone; that they had given it to a young couple who were emigrating to South Carolina, and for the inducement of a thousand dollars, had consented to bring up the child as their own.

“How I lived on after that, does not matter. When I arose from my bed, with reason fully restored, I was what you see me now. For twenty years I sought tidings of Cheyne, and of the ones who had adopted the child. Then I found the lost ones.

"The boy had grown up tall and handsome, but with little resemblance to his father. He lives yet. Wait—presently I will tell you his name.

"Then I found your father. He did not know me; I had sadly changed from the maiden whose beauty he used to praise, and whom he had so often vowed that he loved better than life itself. But I knew him. The eyes of hatred are keener than those of love. I knew him, and he knew me *before he died!*

"You remember his death—it has not been so long since that even the memory of man, short lived and treacherous as that is!—could forget it. He was found dead in his bed, with a dagger driven through his breast. Upon the blade of that dagger was a paper containing the one word, "NEMESIS." That was all. No one knew for what he had fallen, or whose hand had driven the avenging weapon, but myself. And—before he died—himself!

"It was *I* that did the deed! I crept to the bedside and paralyzed his limbs with a subtle essence, that still left his brain untrammelled. Then I told him all. He could not move. I pressed the dagger slowly down until it touched the seat of life. He died—and I was avenged!

"A little more and I am done. Your *half-brother* still lives. Nay, more, I expect him every moment. He comes as your deadly enemy. He will first torture you, and then hang you. And I—I will stand by and applaud the deed that makes him a *fratricide!* He is the one whom you know as *Calvin Potter!*"

For a moment Bertram Cheyne was silent. He did not believe the wild words of the woman, but there was a dreadful consistency in her tale that horrified him. How had she become so well acquainted with the details of his family?

"Woman, your words have no terror for me. I know that you lie! Even supposing it were true, could a mother treat her son as you intend doing—as you *are* doing?"

"Your tongue says that it is false—your heart—your *face* say that you believe me," triumphantly added Achsa. "But what matters it if you do doubt the truth? *I* know it to be so, and can enjoy my revenge as well. You can think it over. I will leave you to your own reflections. May they be

as pleasant as *mine* have been," and the woman turned and descended the stairs.

We will not attempt to portray the thoughts of the prisoner. It would be useless. They were indescribably bitter and perplexed.

That day, at about noon, Calvin Potter arrived at the lone house, having just returned from Camden, where he had seen one of his deadly enemies doomed to the gallows, and now found that a second one was in his power. His joy was extreme when he found that the plot of Wicher had so bravely succeeded.

He entered the house hastily, where he was met by Achsa.

"Where is he, Achsa, old girl?"

"Up-stairs, impatiently awaiting your arrival. Perhaps he wishes to greet you—as his *half-brother*," maliciously replied the hag.

"Bah! so you have told him that ridiculous yarn, have you?" sneered Potter. "You are smart enough in some things, old girl, but not enough so to fool me in this. But even if Moses himself should come down and tell me that, I would not allow it to cheat me out of my vengeance. He's got to die—but first I have a choice bit of fun for him, and I need your help, good Achsa."

"If it will torture *him*, I am with you, heart and hand!"

"And yet you pretend that he is your son?"

"He is *his* child as well."

"But you say *I* am—and still you do not hate me," laughed Potter, shortly, turning away and not noting the deadly glance cast at him by the Jewess.

Perhaps if he had, he might have felt less confidence in his ally. But he was already ascending the stairs, and Achsa followed him with an activity that belied her aged looks.

"Well, my dear friend, this is exceeding kind and thoughtful in you," began Potter, maliciously. "To forget all our little differences and pay me a friendly visit like this. Really, I am much obliged!"

Bertram Cheyne did not reply, save by a glance of scornful hatred, and then averted his eyes. The face of the Tory flushed crimson and his eyes flashed wickedly as he noted this, but his voice was steady and smooth when he resumed.

"To prove what I say, I intend sending for one of your friends to come and condole with you over the sad mishap that befell your poor followers. No doubt you will be happy to see her—for it is a lady. And to do still further honor to your visit, I purpose to have a wedding here to-night. There is one of my men—a capital fellow, by the way—who will act the reverend to perfection, who has consented to lend us his services. Madam Achsa, here, will give the bride away, while you can act as witness, audience, et cetera. Then you will be requested to perform a novel dance—an aerial act at the end of a rope—for our edification. Understand?"

Cheyne replied by a deadly glance of hatred, and the Tory proceeded.

"You know the lady—Miss Esther Carew—and I am going to send her an invitation in your name. Do you think she will come?"

"I hope not. Potter, you used once to claim the title of a gentleman. I beg of you not to harm the lady," earnestly replied the partisan.

"I have sworn revenge upon you both—you for horse-whipping me, and she for rejecting my love. All your prayers can not save her or yourself," vindictively added the Tory.

"For myself I do not care—I would scorn to ask a favor of *you*—but beware how you act toward *her*! Whatever wrong you commit will recoil upon your own head. You would be hunted down like a mad-dog!"

"Bah! But come, Achsa, it is time you were going."

"What am I to do?"

"To devise some means by which you can decoy Esther Carew here—or at least so far from the house that her cries can not be heard there. Tell her that Bertram Cheyne is here—wounded—dying, if you will, and that he begs her to visit him once more. I will send a couple of men with you, and you can ride nearly to the house. Then if she suspects any thing, and cuts up on the road, why the boys will seize her and bring her here without any more ado. Do you understand?"

"Yes, and I will do it. I would give ten years of my life to see that proud minx humbled," vindictively muttered the
hug.

"Well, you *shall* witness it, my good Achsa, and at far less than at that price, too. But come; I will give the boys their instructions. There is no time to lose," cried Potter, exultingly, as he descended the stairs followed by the Jewess, who had donned her hood and cloak while talking.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CUNNING DECOY.

ACHSA mounted behind one of the two Tories, who had been selected as kidnappers, in case the first plan should fail, and then the trio rode rapidly out of the clearing. They had not more than three miles to go at the furthest, and so did not hasten themselves, but half an hour saw them at the end of the plantation where they had agreed to wait.

They allowed Achsa to dismount, and then withdrew further into the woods, where they secured their animals, and returning to the edge of the bridle-path, concealed themselves in the bush, awaiting the progress of the plot. Achsa hobbled along at a rapid rate until within sight of the house, and then slackened her pace to what seemed a painfully decrepit one.

As she reached the gate leading up to the negro-quarters, she suddenly met a negro lad face to face. He gave one glance at her, and turned to flee, with a ludicrously affrighted expression upon his sleek ebony face.

"Stop there—stop I say, or I'll—" began Achsa, who well knew in what light she was regarded by the superstitious children of Africa.

"Wha'—wha' d'ye want? I ain't done nuffin—'twas dat yere boy Jim!" stammered the negro, pausing, afraid to disobey her commands.

"Look at me—do you know who I am?"

"You—you's de wit—I dunno," he faltered.

"Yes you do. I'm the witch of the swamp, and if you don't do just as I tell you, and tell me the truth, I'll turn you into a tadpole!"

"For de Lor' sake, *don't*, missus; 'deed I'll do jest as you tole me!"

"Well, then, is your young mistress at home?"

"Missee Est'er? yes."

"Well, then, do you go and tell her that I wish to see her down at the gate. But don't you dare to fool me—if you do—"

"'Deed I won't! I'll tell her jest dat, an' won't let nobody else know nuffin 'tall, *I won't*," declared the negro, darting off upon his mission.

Achsa watched him impatiently from the gate, and then ran over her plan. It was simple, and was substantially the same as that suggested by Potter. And then she beheld the tall, queenly form of Esther approaching her, with an expression of wondering curiosity upon her beautiful features.

"My good woman," she uttered, as she neared the gate, "one of the boys told me that you wished to see me. Will you not come up to the house and rest?"

"No, I can not, though I sadly need it. I have traveled very fast for an old creature like me. But it was a matter of life and death," replied Achsa, as if breathless with fatigue.

"Life and death—and I? Surely there is some mistake!" echoed Esther, gazing keenly at the woman.

"No, there is none—if indeed you are the one I presume. You are Esther Carew?"

"Yes."

"Then there is no mistake. Last night I was aroused from my sleep by the sound of firing, and the groans and cries of wounded and dying men. I did not dare stir for fear I should be killed also, and then the sounds died away. But I could not sleep, so I got up and made a fire, fearing to go out of doors.

"It was an hour after this, I should judge, when somebody rapped at the door. I listened and there came a faint groan. Then there came a second knock. I asked who was there, and then a voice replied, so faint and husky that I could scarcely distinguish the words:

"*'A soldier—a dying man who craves shelter in the name of God!'*

"I could not resist this appeal, and opened the door.

There he lay, a ghastly-looking sight! He had fainted and I thought he was dead. But I managed to get him into the house and upon a blanket, and then tried to bring him to. I worked till broad daylight, and still he lay there like a dead man, only I could feel a faint fluttering at his heart. So faint that it seemed as though a child's breath could blow out the spark of life!"

"But he did not die?" breathlessly cried Esther, strangely excited; she did not dare reason why.

"No, he did not die. He opened his eyes, but was out of his head. He raved pitifully about home and friends, and about his loved one. I could not restrain my tears as I thought of the fearful blow that awaited them, when they should learn the sad tidings!"

The Jewess actually shed a crocodile tear, affected by her own fabrication. Esther was trembling like an aspen leaf, with a strange premonition of coming sorrow racking her heart.

"His name—did you learn it?"

"Yes, I learned it, and also that of the woman he loved," slowly replied Achsa, as if reveling in the torture of suspense she was inflicting upon Esther. "Lady, it pains me to the heart to tell you, but *he* bade me. Can you bear it?"

"Oh, my God! not him—not him!" moaned the girl, supporting herself against the gate. "Do not say that it was *him*!"

"I must. He bade me tell you to hasten. That he must see you once more before he died. He couldn't rest in his grave without bidding you adieu. He bade me describe him to you, if you doubted my word, but that he knew his name would be sufficient."

"The name—tell me! Oh, if it should be he—I would die!" gasped Esther.

"No, rather live and try to nurse him back to life—and you. His name is *Bertram Cheyne*!"

"Come!" said Esther, in a tone that astonished Achsa, it was so cold and even. "Come, show me the way, I will go to him."

"But you are bareheaded—"

"What matters that? Did not *he* bid me come?"

"Very well then," added the decoy, with inward exultation at having so easily succeeded in her foul plot. "But lend me your arm, for I am old and sadly wearied."

"Here—lean heavily—I can bear it. But hasten—do not talk—it would kill me now!"

And then the two proceeded at a rapid pace down the road, the apparently decrepit woman keeping pace with the nearly distracted girl. They passed by the clump of bushes, and Achsa made a slight signal, as agreed upon, to signify that their services were not needed.

In a comparatively short time the clearing was reached, and the decoy saw with relief that Potter had removed all signs that might betray the place being occupied. But Esther was so agitated that she would scarcely have noticed them, even had this precaution been neglected. The thought of her lover lying there alone, dying, or perhaps dead, almost drove her frantic.

"See!" panted Achsa, indicating the building. "There is the house. He is lying in the front room."

Esther did not reply, but shaking off the hand that clutched her arm, she sped forward like a startled fawn, little dreaming of the reception that awaited her. She pushed open the door and entered with a low cry, but then paused in blank dismay.

The room was half filled with rough-looking men, strangers to her. But there was one whom she needed not a second glance at to recognize. No mistaking those handsome, devilish features for other than Calvin Potter, the outlawed Tory.

Esther did not attempt to flee; the surprise had transfixed her to the spot. But when Potter sprung forward it broke the spell, and turning, the betrayed girl darted back into the open air.

She was suddenly checked by a form, and then Achsa's arms were flung around her waist, holding her, despite the desperate efforts she made to free herself.

"No, no, my dainty bird, no use to struggle. The fowler has got you safe!" muttered the Jewess, as she dragged the maiden back to the door where stood Potter, who had paused upon seeing that Esther was captured.

"And you—a woman—could betray me into the hands of such a villain!"

"I am not a woman—I was one, long years since, but I am not now! I am only an outcast—a pariah—who is only happy in doing harm and injury to those who are more fortunate," bitterly replied Achsa.

"Then you lied about *him*?"

"No, he is here," interrupted Potter, impatient to begin his sport; "and I doubt not is as anxious to see you, as you are to see him. Come with me and you shall see your *lover*."

"I will not—you—" cried Esther, striving to release her arm from his strong grasp.

"Now see here, Miss Carew, I don't want to be rude, or obliged to use force, toward the lady whom I have selected for my wife, but if you are obstinate, I shall have to do so. You must go; if not of your own accord, then I must convey you. So now take your choice," decisively replied the Tory

"He is here—Bertram Cheyne?"

"Yes. He is up-stairs—a prisoner. Will you come?"

"If I must, I will walk. Do not touch me. I will give you my promise not to attempt an escape if you will agree not to lay your hand upon me."

"For the present I will agree to it. There will be time enough for that when we are—*man and wife*—ha! ha!" pointedly replied Potter.

"That time will never come," simply answered Esther, entering the house and ascending the stairs.

She uttered a cry of anguished terror as her eyes fell upon the position of her lover; bound and with a rope around his neck. Reaching forward she cast off the noose and essayed to untie the cords that were embedded deep in the swollen flesh, sobbing:

"Bertram—oh, to think that this should be our meeting—in *his* power!"

"My darling! I never thought to see the time when I would really regret having you beside me; I could bear all that he can inflict upon me—but you—! My God! it is too much!" and the strong man bowed his head and groaned aloud, while the great scalding tears trickled down his cheeks, falling upon the upturned face of the kneeling maiden.

Calvin Potter stood close by, with an indignant sneer upon his countenance, evidently hugely enjoying the grief and

despair of his victims. Beside him was the bent form of Achsa, the Jewess, whose black eyes fairly burned with an expression of Satanic glee, as she leaned upon her crooked staff.

"Really, my friends," began Potter, in a tone of mock sympathy, "this is too bad! I really pity you. But still it seems to me that those are not exactly the faces that ought to be worn at a wedding. You ought to brighten up and be merry. Don't you see how happy and light-hearted I am?"

"By the way, perhaps I had better explain a little, regarding my plans. Then when you are thoroughly posted, you will know just what is expected, and can act accordingly. Well, then, first I am going to get married, and as I have chosen this fair lady to enact the part of bride, why of course she is to be married also. Cheyne, here, will act as witness, and Madam Achsa has kindly consented to give away the bride.

"Then all that remains is the minister. That for a time puzzled me, as the chaplain of my company was fool enough to get killed, a day or two since. But as I spoke to the boys about it, one of them kindly volunteered to act as such. 'Tis true he has never taken orders, but he intends doing so one of these fine days; and that will make it all legal, especially between such good friends and honest people as we are.

"He is an old friend of yours, Cheyne, and I believe owes you quite a debt. So as this was a good opportunity to discharge it, he embraced the chance, eagerly. He is called Jim Gavin. Ha! I see you know him!" cried the Tory, as the young partisan gave a convulsive start.

A wild thrill of joy pervaded the soldier's frame as he heard the name. He knew Gavin well, and that he was a strong and true-hearted patriot, who had joined Potter for the express purpose of breaking up the gang.

And he knew, too, that the spy would never have volunteered to take part in such a villainous task only that he had some plan in view to aid his old commander, and to frustrate the base plot of the Tory. But these hopes were not openly betrayed. After the first involuntary start, Cheyne controlled his feelings and made no reply.

"Well, that does not matter. When we are once fairly married, then *you* have a part to perform. Do you see that

tree yonder—beside the window, there? You can see the limbs against the sky. One of those, this rope, and your body: a trio—united, what would be the result? We shall see. It is impolite, I know, to turn you out in the night, but this hook overhead, I fear, will not hold your weight. And then, besides, this is our *bridal chamber*! ha! ha!”

“Enough of this buffoonery,” impatiently said the young partisan. “Do your worst and have it over with.”

“Impatient, are you? Well, so am I. But you must wait a little longer. Gavin has gone with some of the men to our old camping-ground, to get some liquor from a *cache*. Who ever heard of a genuine wedding but what all concerned got gloriously drunk? Out upon such cold-blooded affairs, say I! For my part, I intend to get as drunk as a “b’iled owl”—to drown my matrimonial cares, you see,” and the Tory laughed discordantly.

“Well, as you two are about to part forever, I suppose you have sundry matters that you would like to discuss, privately, and as I always like to please my friends, I will leave you alone together for a short time. But the house is well guarded, and I trust to your honor, Cheyne, not to run off with my—*wife*—ha! ha!” laughed Potter, turning away. “Come, Achsa, old girl, let’s go and see if the boys have returned yet.”

“Esther,” whispered Cheyne, as the couple descended the stairs, “cheer up. There is hope yet! You heard him mention Jim Gavin? Well, that man is my friend, and true to the heart. He has devised some means to free us, I know, or he would never have consented to act such a part. You must watch him closely, and obey his every action. He is bold, shrewd, and quick-witted. I believe that he will save us!”

Their conversation need not be dwelt upon. They were both fully satisfied that their best course was to await the action of Gavin, as they knew a strict guard would be kept upon the house, for the present, at least.

And thus the minutes rolled on, until two hours elapsed. The twilight had long deepened into night, and still the Tory did not return.

Then there came a confused uproar from without; the

shouting, cursing, singing as of some crowd of bacchanals, and it was quite evident that the party under Jim Gavin had returned from the liquor *cache*. Equally as plain was it that they had not been niggardly in their libations, and the hopes of the partisan grew stronger as he saw that this agent was likely to prove a valuable one in effecting their liberation.

In a short time Potter and Achsa came up the stairs, bearing several flasks of liquor, and in apparent high glee. From below could be heard the clink of glasses that told an orgie had begun in celebration of the outlaw leader's "marriage."

"Well, my friends, tired of waiting? The last words spoken, and all that, I suppose? Good! here's to the health of you both, especially that of my blooming bride-elect!" and Potter took a copious draught of liquor from the bottle; and this was not the first, by several, judging from his thick speech and flushed face.

"Confound that Gavin, why don't he come? Achsa, girl, go and see what is keeping him. The unmannerly dog! to keep a lady waiting like this!"

Achsa disappeared, and then the Tory leader resumed:

"Now, Esther, my bird, I trust you will have the good sense to submit gracefully to the inevitable, and not make a fuss. It would only be disagreeable, and would not do the slightest particle of good. The boys are busy drinking, and are deaf, for I told them not to mind any voice but mine. Unless I called, they were not to mind any thing that occurred up here. Do you understand? You might screech out until you split your throat, or was black in the face, and no one would heed your cries," malignantly laughed Potter.

Several minutes elapsed before the Jewess returned, and, then when she did, a ludicrous-looking figure accompanied her. It was Jim Gavin, dressed up in one of her old black dresses, that dragged the floor, and was so large that it fitted the slender form of the spy much as a shirt is said to fit a bean-pole.

"Captain Potter," said Achsa, chuckling, "this is the priest. As he had forgotten his robes, I made him put on my gown as a substitute."

"Good!" cried the Tory, who was just at that stage of drunkenness which inclines one to be pleased with any thing

and anybody. "I salute your worship! Allow me to introduce you to the bride—Miss Esther Carew," bowed Potter, with mock ceremony.

As Gavin bowed, he managed to give Cheyne a glance of encouragement, that told him not to despair. Then he stood erect and said:

"Well, we may as well perceed to business, I reckon. Cap'in, you an' miss stan' this a-way. You needn't take holt o' han's yit. Old gal, you stand kinder ahind the boss—but fust, shut an' lock that door. I don't want those pesky fellows down thar a-peekin' in an' a-laughin' at me. Thar now, take your places. All ready?"

"Yes," replied Potter and the Jewess.

The situation was this. In the center of the room sat Bertram Cheyne, bound to his chair, facing the window in the north end of the house. Before him stood Esther Carew and Calvin Potter, standing side by side, while Achsa peered over their shoulders.

Jim Gavin stood behind the young partisan. The one door of the room was upon his left-hand side, and a little to the rear of his position.

CHAPTER IX.

COON CLIMBS A TREE.

WE left Coon Rogers, upon the night of his escape from the guard-house at Camden, after he had run the gantlet of the sentinels and entered the swamp. He had little fear of being recaptured here, but knowing that the search would be long and persistent, he did not deem it prudent to cease his exertions until day-dawn.

He had been idle so long, confined in a cell where he had scarcely room to stretch his legs to their full extent, that he felt a sense of peculiarly exultant freedom, and strode through the swamp with a light, springy step that carried him over the miry waste with astonishing ease and rapidity.

Thus he sped on until the gray lighting up of the eastern horizon warned him that the day was at hand, and that he had better search for some place of refuge where he might hope to lie concealed until night came again. He knew that he was literally surrounded by enemies, for more than once during the night he had heard the tramp of horses' hoofs, and the jingle of sabers, while once he had narrowly escaped a collision with two men, who were making their way through the swamp upon foot; only by dodging behind a tree had he eluded their sight.

Coon knew that these were after him, and it was plain from their words that he had caught, they were men used to swamp life. These were the ones that the scout dreaded the most, for he felt only contempt for the cavalry, whom he knew he could easily elude in the woods—the more readily, as probably these horsemen were strangers to the peculiar species of woodcraft required for the work.

As the rosy light began to glimmer down through the treetops, Coon glanced around and sought for a place where he could lie concealed until the heat of the chase was over. This he soon found in a bushy tree that grew upon one edge of a small island or hillock that rose above the level of the swamp.

He waded cautiously through the mire, until he could reach one of the low, hanging boughs, which he grasped and adroitly drew himself up into the tree. Once there, Coon soon ensconced himself where he could rest easily, and yet have a partial view of the swamp surrounding the island, through minute interstices that were too small to betray him to any prying eye that might chance to rest upon the tree.

Scarcely had Coon concealed himself, when he became aware of the presence of others in his vicinity. Knowing that they could scarcely be friends, he awaited the result in breathless silence.

If the mud had not yet settled over his tracks, there was danger of the tell-tale signs being observed, and then he could scarcely hope to escape without a fight for life. As to being taken alive, it was not to be thought of for a moment.

Then Coon saw the forms of two men approaching the hillock. He believed them to be none other than the two

whom he had so narrowly escaped coming in contact with, the night before. To his chagrin, they paused on gaining the high ground, and threw themselves wearily down upon the coarse grass, with grunts of satisfaction.

"Wal, Zeb," said one, wiping his heated brow with his shirt-sleeve—coat he had none—and removing his hat, "what d' you think about it *now*?"

"Jest as you say. It's a durned piece o' tom-foolery this trapsein' all over a'ter *that* or'nary cuss!"

"But the reward, Zeb—fifty pound ain't picked up every day, let me tell ye."

"No more it ain't; nor it won't be picked up this day, by us, nuther. I reckon he must 'a' got cl'ar off afore this. Wonder how the pesky imp got out, anyway?"

"Why, don't you know?"

"No; I was asleep when you waked me, you know, an' then we sot right off."

"Wal, you know thet Ralph Earley hed some sort o' grudge ag'in' him, an' like a dratted fool he wouldn't wait to let the spy hang, like a decent man would 'a' done, but he must kill him hisself. So he p'isoned the feller on guard an' gits in the guard-house. This Coon must 'a' cotched him unawar's, tied him up an' then slid off on his ear.

"Anyhow when they went to change guards, the soldier was stone-dead with the bottle aside him. The door was fastened, but when it was opened they found Ralph thar, tied neck an' crop, an' t'other feller gone cl'ar. He met the Gin'ral an' knocked the wind purty nigh outen him. That sorter riled the boss, an' he offered fifty pounds reward for the spy, dead or alive."

"Lord! wouldn't I jest like to lay peepers on the cuss? Wouldn't I make him howl Yankee Doodle? Bet yer life!"

"Kill him?"

"Sure! A skelp, or even a head 'd kerry easier 'n a live critter. But—"

"Look thar, Zeb," hastily cried the other scout, interrupting the brutal words of his comrade, and pointing toward the swamp in the direction from whence Coon had come. "Somebody's bin through yere inside a half-hour! Look at the bubbles o' mud a-workin' up to the surface!"

"Bill, ye're right, by thunder! An' look—they come cl'ar to the aidge o' the hummock hyar!"

"Furder 'n thet. I tell you Zeb, our chaine fer thet fifty pound is a-lookin' up. Our game hez bin right hyar, fer a thousan'!"

Meanwhile Coon was far from being at ease. He could plainly distinguish the words of the man-hunters below, and knew that in case they suspected his presence he must fight for life.

He gently moved the muzzle of his musket around, so that he could discharge it in an instant, and then awaited the termination of the adventure. The next words of the Tory, called Zeb, hastened the catastrophe.

"Look, Bill, the tracks don't come up on the dry—nor yit go 'round. An' see—look at the splotch o' mud on thet limb! By—! *the varmint is treed!*"

He never uttered another word. A loud report rung out upon the still air, and from the spout of flame-tinged smoke that puffed out from the leafy branches, an ounce bullet pierced the brain of the man-hunter, and he fell over against his comrade, who staggered back in surprise.

Coon did not await for the Tory to recover from the confusion he had been thrown into by the unexpected death-shot, but sprung lightly through the branches down to the ground. Unluckily one foot slipped and he fell heavily upon his side.

As if the sight of an enemy had roused the man-hunter's worst passions, he sprung forward with a howl of rage and fury, drawing his long knife, eager to avenge the death of his comrade. But he had a cunning foeman to deal with, and seeing that he could not arise in time to avoid the thrust, Rogers rolled rapidly over the ground toward his enemy.

He struck the Tory's feet before that worthy perceived his intentions, and then with a vigorous jerk, toppled him heavily backward, the knife flying from the man's hand, to some little distance.

Then with a grunt of exultant fury, Coon flung himself upon his enemy, who struggled desperately to free himself from the vice-like grip that was fastened upon his throat. But his efforts were in vain.

Strong and supple as he was he had met his equal, if not superior, and with the advantage Coon had so quickly gained, the Tory was overmatched. Fearing to lose time, the spy drew his knife and plunged it to the very haft in the breast of his foe.

The Tory gave one great quiver, and then his limbs relaxed in the embrace of death. The victor arose panting, and gazed down with a stern, vindictive expression upon his features, upon his ghastly handiwork.

But why does he start and glance hurriedly about him? He knows that another danger threatens him.

He can hear the splash of horses' feet in the miry swamp, and jingling of saber-scabbards against saddles. And he knew that his shot had alarmed a squad of cavalry, who can scarcely be other than enemies.

Coon Rogers was not a man to hesitate long. He knew that he must flee for his life.

Grasping one of the long rifles that had belonged to the Tories, he snatched off the accompanying powder-horn and bullet-pouch, and slinging them over his shoulder, glided from the hummock and plunged into the swamp, just in time to escape the view of a score of horsemen whose uniform denoted them some of Tarleton's rough-riders. He could hear the cries of rage and anger that followed the discovery of the two dead scouts, and then dashed rapidly through the swamp, choosing the most tangled path he could find, knowing that this would delay his pursuers; or if they did not follow in his trail, that he could easily mislead them.

Pausing for a moment, Coon satisfied himself that they were indeed upon his trail, and then resumed his course. He glided through the tangled depths with an ease and celerity truly wonderful, and as mile after mile was traversed, he found that he had either misled his pursuers, or else distanced them, for he could no longer hear their cries or the trampling of their horses' hoofs.

Still he did not deem it safe to pause, until he had put a long distance between himself and the spot where had occurred the double tragedy. And then he pressed on, hour after hour, until the shades of night began once more to settle down over the earth.

The scout had just crossed the road, near the spot where he had been captured by Hamlin, when he was startled by the sound of horses' feet. Instantly seeking cover, he eagerly peered out upon the party that presently appeared in sight.

A deep scowl flitted athwart his visage as he saw they were a band of Tories; several of whom he recognized as men whom he had met and conversed with upon the island, while detained in the camp of Calvin Potter. And a deep, settled determination rested upon his face as he resolved to follow them, and discover whether his deadly foe made one of their number.

If he did, and an opportunity offered, a rifle-shot would fully revenge him. And that shot he would fire did it cost him his life the next moment.

With such thoughts Coon Rogers glided after the band, that numbered perhaps a dozen, all told. He followed them until the island was reached, and then lay in ambush, closely noting their every action.

As they ignited torches and began to dig up the ground in a certain spot, Coon recognized one of them as being Jim Gavin, and immediately gave one of their signals; the low, tremulous cry of the whippowill, abruptly broken off as though the bird had been suddenly alarmed. Gavin started, and rising erect, gazed keenly around him.

Coon arose and partially revealed himself to the spy, making at the same time the secret sign. Gavin nodded significantly, and then strolled carelessly away from the rest, until close beside the scout, and concealed in the underbrush from the Tory band.

"Who are you?" he muttered, anxiously.

"Coon Rogers."

"Thank the Lord! You be just the man I'd ruther see then— But you are alone?"

"Yes."

"The cap'n is in danger—Cheyne, you know—and I want you to help me. Potter has got him an' Miss Est'er, an'—"

"Where at?"

"The swamp witch's house—used to be old Tom Rainford's."

"Tell me what about it, and your plans—if you have any."

Jim Gavin complied, and related the facts of the capture in a few hasty words, as he had heard it, being ill at the time and consequently kept in ignorance of the plot until too late to frustrate it, as he otherwise might and would have done.

"Very well. I will help you if I can. But how can I get in?"

"Thar's a tree clust to the house, an' the limbs rubs ag'inst the windows. You climb up thar—ef the boys do any on 'em see you they'll think you're one o' the gang, but the whisky 'll be apt to keep 'em busy—an' git so's you kin look in. I'm to act as the preacher, an' I'll fix 'em so they cain't none o' them see you. Then when I make the motion, why you jest jump in an' take a han'. Understand?"

"Yes, and I'll do it. I owe that Potter one anyhow, and this will be a good time to square accounts."

"All right then; but you'd best start now, so's to git thar afore us. I'll git the boys to drinkin' an' keep 'em back to 'low you plenty o' time. But you must make haste."

"You will find me there—never fear," and then Rogers turned and glided away with as much speed as if he had not been for hours upon the tramp.

In a remarkably short time he gained the clearing that surrounded the "witch's house," and then circled around it in order to discover the best means of reaching the tree. There were lights burning both above and below, in the house, and no signs of anybody keeping guard.

This was encouraging to the scout, for it told him the Tories had no fears of being molested by an enemy, that night. And then prostrating himself, Coon began stealthily crawling through the weeds toward the house, after securing his rifle upon his back in order to leave him the free use of his hands.

In a few minutes he had gained the foot of the tree, and paused to see if there was any danger of his being discovered. Seeing nothing to cause alarm, Coon nimbly scaled the tree, soon gaining a point from whence he could look into the building through the dilapidated window.

A glare of bitter hate filled his eyes as he noted the exultant sneering visage of his bitter enemy, Calvin Potter, standing before Esther Carow and Bertram Cheyne, and reaching one

hand around to his rifle, he unslung it from his shoulder. But then he restrained the impulse and composed himself to await the proper time for action.

It was close at hand.

CHAPTER X.

JIM GAVIN'S LITTLE GAME.

JIM GAVIN gazed blandly upon the persons standing before him. There was a smile upon his rugged features and a mild, almost whimsical light in his keen gray eyes, as though he entered fully into the burlesque about to be enacted.

But beneath this calm exterior there was a feeling of oppressive anxiety. A tumult of doubt, hope, fear and stern resolve raged in his heart.

He knew that to fail in his plot would insure the destruction of himself as well as that of his friends. And what chances were they that he would succeed? Scarcely one in fifty.

A call of the Tory leader would be sufficient to bring upon them the entire force of the Tory band from below. His only hope then was in preventing this cry from being uttered.

The orders given by Calvin Potter were all in his favor. Excited by drink and not seeing how his prey could escape him, the Tory leader had ordered his band to pay no attention to what might transpire above stairs, unless they should hear his signal, for he felt assured that his victims would not submit without resistance, and he did not care to have the Tories' rude gaze upon Esther, now that their worst passions were aroused by the fiery whisky.

Jim Gavin stood close behind Bertram Cheyne, with one hand resting upon his shoulder. The ample black robe was spread out, and in a measure concealed the bound hands and arms of the young partisan.

At this moment the prisoner gave a start, slight, but significant; and then he dropped his eyes to conceal the gleam of

exultant hope that sparkled in their depths. He had observed a form through the window, crouching upon a branch, and looking closely, had distinguished the features of the rebel scout, Coon Rogers.

"Ladies *an'* gentlemen," began Gavin, knowing that every moment now gained would be in their favor, from the increasing din below stairs, that told the Tory band were rapidly becoming drunk. "It is a solumn 'casion what calls us all up yere in this splendiferous abode of—spiders *an'* cobwebs! But that ain't no matter now.

"You ax what is this yere 'casion? Ef ye don't, why we'll jest s'pose you do, fer argyment sake. An' I tell you that it is to marry the cap'n to this 'ere leddy. I don't s'pose it's any use to ax you is you all willin', so I won't do it. Now then—onc't more—be you all ready?"

"Yes; stop your nonsense and go ahead," impatiently cried Potter.

"Look a-here, cap'n, whose a-doin' of this 'ere marryin'—you or me?"

"You—but go on."

During this slowly-uttered oratorical effort, Gavin was by no means idle. His hidden hand had drawn a knife from beneath the dress, and its keen edge was deftly applied to the cords that bound Bertram Cheyne; after which the haft of the knife was inserted in the right hand of the partisan.

Then as the spy uttered the last question, he dropped his hands and clenched a brace of ready pistols that were at his belt. When Potter replied, Gavin jerked out the weapons, and, cocking them as they rose to a level, thrust them almost against the faces of the Tory and Jewess.

"So 'm I ready, *an'* ef either one on ye two stir a peg or utter a sound above a cat's whisper, I'll blow your brains out that very moment! Understand me?" he hissed, in a low, deadly tone, while his keen eyes flashed steadily along the leveled tubes.

"What do you, mean, Gavin? Don't you know me?" faltered the astonished Tory, flinching visibly back before the grinning muzzle that stared him steadily in the eyes.

"Bet yer life I do! A heap better'n you do *me* I reckon. Stop! don't you speak—don't you dare to stamp your foot

Ef ye do I'll plug ye ! I hold the trump keerds this deal, an' you've got to face the music. The least n'ise 'll be your death. You know I don't of'n miss my aim. Cap'n Cheyne, s'pose you git up an' tie these folks. Mr. Coon Rogers, *Esquire*, you kin come in now. Thar's still work for you to do ; a plenty."

The young partisan did not hesitate long, but quickly severed the cord that still bound his ankles, and then clutched the trembling, craven-hearted Tory by the throat, just as the rebel scout sprung through the broken window, in obedience to a motion from Gavin. Achsa uttered a shriek and sprung toward the door at the sudden crash, but Gavin leaped forward and clutched her, closing her mouth by a strong and by no means delicate grasp. He was aided by Coon, and together they bore her to the floor, despite her desperate struggles.

Just then there came a heavy, unsteady tramp upon the stairway, mingled with shouts and cries from the bacchanals below. They evidently had been alarmed by the sudden disturbance, and had sent up to inquire what was the matter !

Then there came a heavy knock at the door. Gavin glided over to where Potter laid upon the floor, having been bound down by the rebel partisan, and picking up the knife, placed its keen point against the Tory's throat, hissing :

"Ax him what does he want—but don't say any thin' more or I'll shove this 'ere knife clean home !"

In a trembling tone, Potter uttered :

"What do you want?"

"Is it you, cap'n ? We heerd the tum'le, an' thought mebbe as how you had got inter trouble," replied a husky voice from without.

"Tell him it's all right—to go down-sta'rs an' mind his own bisness," prompted Gavin, pressing down upon the point until it drew blood.

"It is all right. Go down-stairs and mind your own business !" echoed Potter, in such an unsteady and husky voice, that had not the senses of the Tory been blunted by the fiery liquor he had swallowed, he must have known that something was wrong.

But he was evidently reassured, and turning, went stumbling

down the stairs, muttering incoherently, as if not greatly pleased with the unceremonious words of his leader. Then there came a renewed chorus of shouts from below, mingled with coarse laughs and ruder words, when the result of the visit became known.

"Look here," muttered Coon, arising from the form of the Jewess whom he had been holding to prevent her from making any outcry. "I fear I've killed this woman. I didn't think; I only meant to keep her from crying out."

"No, she has only fainted," replied Esther, feeling of the woman's heart. "She will recover in a few moments."

"Best tie her hands an' feet, then," added Jim Gavin, approaching the trio. "You do it, Coon, while I 'tend to *this* chap. This 'ere dress 'll work bully fer that—*durn* the thing! I don't see how the wimmen can stand the dratted things a-floppin' 'round thar— Hello!" and he suddenly interrupted himself. "Beg pardin, Miss Est'er, I didn't mean to say that," he added, fairly blushing.

"Let me help you," she replied, with a faint smile at his comical expression. "There—this way."

"Thankee, Now hyar, boss, take an' tie her. Best put a gag in her mouth, too, or she'll be a-squallin' like fury, presently. See, she's a-comin' to, now!"

The dress was quickly torn into strips and then the two prisoners were securely bound and gagged, to render all attempts at outcry useless. Calvin Potter did not offer the slightest resistance.

The sudden change of affairs, added to the startling reappearance of the man whom his own words had doomed to death, beyond the seeming possibility of escape, appeared to have completely paralyzed him, body and mind. He could do nothing but glare wildly at the form of his enemy, whom he had believed dead, hours ago.

CHAPTER XI.

COON UNMASKS.

WHEN Calvin Potter and Achsa, the Jewess, were fairly bound, Bertram Cheyne turned to Esther and clasped her to his breast in a fond embrace, while their hearts went up in a silent thanksgiving for this sudden and wonderful change in the toils that had encompassed them. The two scouts with native delicacy turned away, and began consulting together upon their future movements.

"Well, what next, friend Gavin?" muttered Coon Rogers.

"We must git out o' hyar afore the leftenant gits back, fer he'd be bound to come up an' see the fun ef he had to bu'st down the door. He wouldn't mind like t'other feller did. He's the *raal* boss, 'stead o' Potter. Ef 'twasn't fer the gal we could git out in the tree, and give 'em the slip that way."

"We could manage it for her, well enough, but about *him*. I have sworn that he should never live to see the sun rise again," sternly responded Coon.

"Run a knife through him. He's a-plenty mean enough for it. Or *I'll* do it if you say the word!"

"No. It must be *my* hand. But you are well known to the Tories below; can not you devise some pretext to draw them away from the house? Make up some story and say that Potter sent it."

"I don't know—I'm afeard the boys won't leave thar picker. But I kin try. You shet an' fasten the door ahind me, an' don't open until you hear my voice a-tellin' of you to."

"All right. Try to get them away, but if you can't, then come back and we'll try the tree," whispered Coon, cautiously opening the door and allowing Gavin to pass out; then closing it once more.

Coon Rogers then glided over to where the Tory leader lay bound and gagged upon the floor, glaring at the rebel scout with mingled rage and fear. Rogers picked up the heavy

form and placed him upon the chair; then standing before him he removed his slouched hat, and tossed back the hair from his forehead, saying:

"Look at me, Calvin Potter. You know me—you have seen me before now, more than once. There is a look in your eyes that shows how well you know me, not only as 'Coon Rogers,' but as Werner Mayford. Ha! that touches you! I thought it would!

"Do you remember a time, years ago—over five now it is—that you were the *bosom friend* of my brother Henry Mayford? You know, too, that he was killed—do you know *how* he died? Let me tell you. He was shot from an ambush, while a party of us were out hunting. No one *knew* who was the murderer—at least, so it was believed—save the one who committed the cowardly and bloody deed.

"No one suspected you—how could they? When you mourned so deeply and bitterly over the blood-stained corpse of your friend! But there *was* a man who witnessed the murder; a poor, drunken, wretched squatter, but he dared not tell, for the man who had fired the secret shot held his life at his mercy. Besides, he was a well-known dissipated fellow, and his word would not be of any weight against that of the murderer. None would have credited his assertions for a moment.

"When I raised my company of rangers, to fight for liberty, this man joined them. I treated him as a fellow-being; not like the worthless dog that all others had looked upon him as being. He came to love me, and more than once he hinted at a dark and bitter secret that he held. But I thought it all fancy, and did not press him to divulge it; I was full of one thought—how to serve my poor country.

"Then one day he was mortally wounded in a skirmish that he had with the enemy, and sent for me. I went to him, and then he told me all. His name was Barney Amfray—the murderer's name was CALVIN POTTER!"

The features of the Tory leader became frightfully convulsed, and a look of wild horror shone in his painfully protruding eyes. He had long suspected that Mayford was aware of the deed, but now he had received indisputable proof that he was discovered.

There was no shade of pity to be seen in the cold, pitiless eyes of the avenger, that held the Tory's gaze spellbound. Potter could see that his doom was already pronounced.

And to think that there, only separated from him by a few feet, were those who could save him. So near, and yet so far!

"This is your last night upon earth, alive, Calvin Potter," solemnly added Coon—as we must call him. "You have sinned and must be punished. I am the judge—and the executioner, as well. I could have killed you before, but I wanted you to know *why* you had died. You *do* know now, and I am satisfied.

"Hark! your men are being drawn off by *our* friend, James Gavin. Then your two prisoners here will depart free as air. But I shall stay—for a time!"

Meanwhile let us see what success the plan of Jim Gavin met with.

He descended the rickety stairs and was greeted with a boisterous shout of drunken fellowship.

"Boys, the job is done. The cap'n is married all safe, an' he sends me to bid you all drink his health, an' that of his purty wife."

"Good! fill up, Gavin, my hearty, and let's do it double honor!" shouted one of the Tories.

"I'm agreeable, seein' as now we've got a ride afore us," replied Gavin, seizing a bottle.

"What!"

"Just so. He says that we can't stop hyar. We make too much noise—he can't go to sleep. But he says that ef we'll all go back to the old camp in the island, he'll give us each critter a five-poun' note in the mornin'."

A series of wild yells followed this announcement.

"But Gavin, old fel'," added the one who had spoken before, "are we to take the prisoner along?"

"No. The boss says that he'll keep him safe hyar ontel day. Ye see the rebel was a sort o' sweetheart of the cap'n's wife, an' he naturally wants to plague him a little. See?"

"Good! let's go, boys, and get the horses. Take along a bottle or two, each of you, and we'll finish the fun at the island."

This suggestion was immediately acted upon, and each man securing a quantity of the liquor, started out to prepare their animals for their midnight ride.

Jim Gavin headed the little band of Tories as they rode out from the stables, and in a few moments they entered the narrow trail leading from the lone house of Achsa, the Swamp Witch. But here he was doomed to meet with a sudden and unexpected check.

He knew that he had heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, not very far ahead, and in their very track. Were they friends or foes?

The question was speedily answered. A low, tremulous whistle floated to their ears, borne upon the still air, followed closely by another, clear and sharp.

"It's the lieutenant, boys," cried one of the Tories, and he quickly replied with a signal, similar to the one preceding, greatly to Gavin's chagrin.

"Where are you fellows going to?" demanded the lieutenant, riding forward.

"Back to the island. Cap' Cal. sent us," promptly replied Gavin.

"Where is he?"

"Up at the house."

"And the prisoner—the rebel, Cheyne?"

"Up ~~thar~~ too. The cap'n hez jest bin a-gittin' married, an' said as the boys made too much noise to suit him, we must go back to the old camp ontel mornin'."

"Married? What do you mean, Gavin?"

"Jest what I say," coolly returned the spy.

"Who to? Speak out plain, can't you?"

"I reckon I could ef I'd try right hard. Wal, then, he ~~is~~ married, 'ca'se I 'rformed the ceremony. An' Miss Est'er Carew was the happy female critter as he was hitched to."

"What! and Cheyne was there?"

"See'd it all. Lord, you'd jest orter 'a' see'd him! I thought he'd hev a duck fit an' step in it; I did, actilly!"

"And she—how did she take it?"

"Sorter cool, like. I reckon she thought it was no use to make a fuss. Anyhow, she didn't."

"And he sent you all away—the fool! Don't he know that

he is in danger here? Why, Carew has roused the whole country! I heard him, but didn't know what was up until you told me about the girl. Potter must take her away from this, unless he wants to get caught. I wouldn't care much, only he owes me too much for me to let him get caught just yet. Come on, we must go back and tell him what is in the wind."

Gavin was about to demur, when there came the sharp, clear sound of a pistol-shot, proceeding from the direction of the lone house, closely followed by the wild, horrible shrieks as of some mortal being in death-agony.

"Hark!" cried Carl Wicher. "There is trouble at the house, boys. Follow me—quick!"

CHAPTER XII.

HAND-TO-HAND.

For several moments Coon Rogers stood before his bound and helpless enemy, gazing down upon his distorted features with an expression of deadly, vindictive triumph. There was no hope of his relenting.

Then he turned toward the lovers and said in a low, guarded tone.

"Captain Cheyne, you and Miss Carew had best make your escape now, while you can. There is no telling what may happen here, or how soon some of the Tory gang may come back. They are all gone from below, and once out in the swamp, you can easily make your way back to the plantation.

"But you will come with us?"

"No, I have work here to do yet, before I can leave. *That* completed, I will either meet you at the house of this lady, or else any place along the road that you must designate, for I presume you will return at once to the camp?"

"Yes—I must. I will try and gather enough men to return and hunt out this accursed band. I must avenge the

slaughter of my company, so far as that will do it," sternly replied Cheyne.

"Then I will meet you at Mr. Carew's. I shall not be long behind you."

"Mr. Mayford, will you not renounce this deed?" asked Esther, pleading earnestly.

"No; I can not. The blood of my murdered brother calls for vengeance. I should be accursed forever if I did not obey, now that the power lay in my hands," coldly replied the rebel scout.

"So be it, then. Esther, come, let us go," added Cheyne, turning toward the door.

"My God! Bertram, look yonder!" cried the maiden, starting violently, and pointing toward the shattered window.

Cheyne turned quickly and beheld the heavily-bearded visage of a man crouching upon the limb of the tree by which Coon Rogers had entered, peering curiously in upon them. The scout also observed the alarming sight at the same time.

There was no time to hesitate, for the eavesdropper was evidently an enemy, who had been led by a desire to learn what was transpiring in the closed room, to scale the convenient tree, to satisfy his curiosity. Were he allowed to escape, he would undoubtedly hasten at once to call back the Tory gang, and inform them of the important discovery he had made.

This would be ruinous to the plans of the three friends, and Coon Rogers sprung toward the window, drawing a pistol as he did so. The Tory essayed to descend from his perch in time to escape the threatened shot, but in vain.

The weapon covered his head, and then the trigger was touched. The report was mingled with a horrible death-yell as the Tory tumbled headlong to the ground; the same that had so alarmed the marauder, Carl Wicher.

Quick, Cheyne—for your life, be quick! That shot will bring back those fellows in a minute. Help the lady and flee for your life!" cried Coon Rogers, throwing open the door leading to the stairway.

The young partisan passed one arm around Esther's waist, and sprung hastily down the steps. As he flung open the outer door, he abruptly paused with a cry of dismay.

There came to his ears the quick, heavy throb of horses' feet in full gallop, and he could distinguish the forms, faint and shadowy, of a score horsemen, spur out into the moon-lighted clearing, from the bridle-path that wound through the swamp.

They were too late! The golden moment had been allowed to pass by unheeded during their conversation, consequent upon their liberation from the toils of the Tory leader.

Only for a brief instant did Bertram Cheyne hesitate. He knew that did he attempt to flee he would instantly be discovered, and then the well-mounted Tories would easily overtake him ere he could reach the friendly shelter of the wood, incumbered by the maiden.

Alone he might have escaped, but not for a moment did he entertain the thought, and then he started back as Coon touched his shoulder.

"Close and bar the door, Cheyne," muttered the rebel scout, in a stern, deadly tone, as he realized the threatening danger, and seeing how utterly vain were all thoughts of escape by flight. "We must keep them out as long as we can, and then—" he paused and instinctively glanced at the pale but composed face of Esther.

"Do not fear to speak plain before me, my friend; I am not so helpless. Give me a rifle or a pistol, and I will do my part."

"Good! we are three where I thought only two. But do you go up-stairs, Cheyne, and have the door ready to fasten when I come up. It is there that the stand must be made. We can not keep them out here for five minutes. One kick would hurl the rotten door from its hinges," muttered Coon Rogers, as he peered through one of the cracks in the worm-eaten door.

"What are they doing?" asked Cheyne, as he retreated with Esther to the stairway.—

"They have paused, and are spreading out so as to surround the house. Perhaps they fear we are more than we really are. Good! it will help us if they do."

This was indeed the case. The Tory lieutenant, Carl Wicher, though faultlessly brave, and oftentimes recklessly daring, was nevertheless a cool-headed and clear-witted man, who was careful of the lives of those under his command.

True, the pistol might have been discharged by Calvin Potter, and at the prisoner, which would account for the death-cry ; but of this he was not sure, and besides, the glimpse he had caught of the man in the doorway, showed him that it was not his comrade. He called for Jim Gavin, but received no reply.

This man had suddenly and silently disappeared, none could tell where or how, and this fact but strengthened Wicher's suspicions of foul play. Acting under this impression, he halted and ordered the Tories to ride around until they had formed a cordon about the house—a circle that no human person could pass through without discovery.

Then he raised his voice and called out :

"Hallo—Potter !"

"Hallo yourself—what do you want ?" replied Coon, after a minute's pause, during which he decided that the boldest course was the best.

"Who are you ?"

"A white man—who are you ?"

"You are not Calvin Potter !"

"Tell me something I don't know, won't you ?" sneeringly responded Coon.

"What have you done with him, then ?"

"Just made him change places with Captain Cheyne, to see how he liked it."

"Then you are a rebel ?"

"Just so—but wait a moment. We hold your leader in our power, together with the old woman, and if you press on *too* close, they will be sent out through the window to you, fastened at the end of a rope. If you will draw off your men, and allow us to go free, why we will not harm him. But if not, then you must come and take us—if you can ! But the very moment you enter this building, I will kill Potter with my own hand."

"Give up Potter and surrender, and we will spare the lives of all except Captain Cheyne. I give you the honor of a soldier and a gentleman."

"And why not him, also ?" responded Coon.

"For several reasons. Do you consent ?"

"I must consult with my comrades first. But look you.

If any one of you attempts to move any closer, he will be riddled like a sieve. I will give you an answer in five minutes."

"Well, for that time I will hold my men back, but no longer."

Coon Rogers extinguished the lights that burned below, and then ascended the stairs, when he was promptly admitted by Cheyne. Then they secured the door as firmly as possible under the circumstances, and awaited the result.

"Mayford, what hope is there?" asked Cheyne, earnestly.

"None—or at least but a very faint one. Perhaps we can beat them off for half an hour—not more. By that time Gavin may be able to do something for us. Or mayhap some of this lady's friends may chance along. They must have missed her, since dark, and of course would search for her. How did it happen? Is there any chance that they will find out where she went to—or was taken?"

"One of the black boys knows that I went off with that woman. But he fears her so much—as do all the negroes—that he may be afraid to tell," replied Esther.

"Good! we may hope, then. But come, Cheyne. Help me to move this villain up close to the window. He will be a good breastwork."

"What do you mean?"

"Just this. They will try to find out how many we number, before risking an attack, and this window is the only thing that can avail them. He will help fill it up, and then they will be afraid to fire in at us, lest they hit him, instead, and he and the young partisan slid along the chair upon which Potter was bound, until it was close to the window, where he must be observed from without; while carefully kept concealed.

"Hello! within there," called out Wicher, at this juncture. "Time is up; now, what is your answer?"

"Just this. If you want us, you must come and take us—if you can!" cried Coon, boldly. "But if you attempt it, Potter dies that moment!"

Then ensued a deep silence, during which the besieged looked to their weapons. Cheyne had secured those of the Tory leader, and so they were pretty well prepared for the struggle that seemed inevitable.

They might be conquered, but it would not be a bloodless victory. The Tories must pay a high price for the triumph.

Then came a heavy shock at the front door. It rattled noisily on its rusty hinges, but did not fall. A second, quickly following, hurled it half-way across the room, and several of the Tories sprawled in a confused heap upon the floor.

"Now it comes, Cheyne!" muttered Coon Rogers. "Wait until they break the door open, and then let them have it. First your pistols and then the saber and knife."

"Esther, do you stay close to this wall," said the young partisan to his loved one. "You can do no good here, and will only get hurt." She had stood close beside him, clasping a pistol firmly in her hand.

"Listen! they come now. Ready, Cheyne!" gritted the rebel scout, as the heavy rush of the Tories made the rickety stairway groan.

"Say—you in there!" called out Carl Wicher, checking the onset.

"Well, what now?"

"Will you consent to the terms I offered you before? Give up Potter and Cheyne and the rest of you may go free."

"Potter *dies*. You have doomed him. I would not surrender him for a thousand lives!"

"On, boys! One dash and they are ours! That door can not be fastened. On—and ten pounds to the man who takes that fellow alive. We will roast him in the house!"

Just as the heavy rush followed, Esther uttered a sharp cry and touched Cheyne upon the arm.

"Look yonder—Potter?" she gasped.

Cheyne turned and saw that the Tory leader had suddenly disappeared! The bound form of Achsa was still lying upon the floor, but the other was gone, chair and all!

Then came the heavy crash at the door. It splintered in several places. The two men stood, one upon either side of the doorway, with ready weapons.

Then before the second rush could be made, they leveled their pistols at one of the crevices and fired into the densely crowded mass upon the landing. A fearful volley of oaths, curses and cries of pain followed, and the Tories shrinking involuntarily back from the masked battery, several of the

hindmost were crowded from their footing, falling headlong down the steps.

"Give them another, Cheyne," cried Coon Rogers.

"Just so, an' hyar's more o' the same for ve!" cheerily called out a well-known voice, closely following a light jar, as a man sprung into the open window.

"*You* here, Jim Garvin! Then we are indeed lost!" groaned Bertram, as he recognized his faithful adherent.

"Nary time you ain't! Keep 'em back two minutes an' they'll never trouble honest people ag'in. Thar's over fifty o' the boys out thar. Wait till I give 'em the word," added Garvin, approaching the window and uttering a long, shrill whistle.

Again the loud voice of Wicher was heard, and the Tories once more dashed against the shattered door. They were met by a deadly volley of pistol-bullets that lessened their number, but did not check them materially.

Then the door was broken down, and the conflict became hand to hand. Cheyne and Gavin swung their heavy sabers, while Coon, after discharging his rifle, clubbed it and dealt furious blows upon the heads of the foremost.

"Take them alive if you can, but if not, kill the cursed rebels!" yelled Carl Wicher, rushing upon Cheyne with uplifted saber.

They were his last words, for Esther, seeing the danger of her lover, leveled her pistol at the Tory and fired. With a wild cry, he reeled and fell forward, shot through the brain. Then came a heavy rush upon the floor beneath.

"Hurrah! thar comes the boys! Now we've got 'em—hurrah fer us!" screamed Jim Gavin, in an ecstasy of joy.

"Down with 'em, boys! Kill every cursed Tory!" shouted a clear voice from the foot of the stairs.

The Tories heard the words, and sought to flee. But they were hemmed in, and seeing they were doomed, sullenly fought to the last. That minute was a horrible one, but at its end the last one of the Tory band had fallen.

It was not a bloodless victory, though. More than one brave man had gone to their last account. But Cheyne, Coon and Gavin were uninjured. Neither had Esther been harmed.

Coon glanced around for his enemy, but then remembering what had occurred, he rushed to the window and leaped out

Stumbling over some object, he stooped and found it was Calvin Potter still bound to the chair. He was stone-dead. He had chosen the desperate alternative of flinging himself out of the window rather than await the threatened shot from Coon. Falling head first, he had broken his neck.

At this moment Coon observed a large party approaching the house. It proved to be a party led by the almost distracted father, Donald Carew, who had been guided by the negro, Dick, who had confessed at the last moment.

The reader must be left to imagine the meeting between father and daughter; it is beyond the power of our pen to describe it. In his great joy the old gentleman grasped Cheyne's hand, owning that he was a glorious good fellow, begging his pardon for past insults and that the old feud might be forever forgotten. Of course the young partisan was only too glad to comply.

We need add but little more. The reader will remember the silent figure that had followed Wicher to the lone house, with his prisoner. It was one of the partisans, who had then started at once to the American camp, and gathered a force to rescue his captain. Gavin had fallen in with them when he started off to find Donald Carew, and brought them up at the critical moment as described.

Achsa, the "Swamp Witch," was found to have been killed by a random bullet during the conflict in the house, and her secret was buried with her; no one knowing whether her wild story was true or false. Bertram Cheyne never for a moment credited it.

He passed safely through the war, and at its close was wedded to Esther Carew.

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